The Thesis Committee for Erin Marie Frisch
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:

Stitching Female Education: The Marsh School and 18th Century Embroidery in America

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Briley Rasmussen, Supervisor

Dawn Stienecker

Stitching Female Education: The Marsh School and 18th Century Embroidery in America

by

Erin Marie Frisch

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Dedication

To my mother, Elise, who persists and never fails to find joy.

And for those who dare to create despite great odds.

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For those who have aided, I give thanks to thee.

To mine instructors, true and bright,

Dr. Bain, Dr. Heise, Dr. Stienecker.

And to Dr. Rasmussen,

For thine hours of toil and guiding light.

To women brave, leading mine way,

Susan Burrows Swan,

Rozskia Parker,

Betty Ring (a fellow Texan true),

Forever in memory may you stay.

For thy love and unerring care,

Elise, Michael, Lenesa, Jacob, Chris.

This bounty of words with you I share.

Abstract

Stitching Female Education: The Marsh School and 18th Century Embroidery in America

Erin Marie Frisch, MA

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Supervisor: Briley Rasmussen

This research takes a feminist approach in examining the role of needlework in female education in the 18th century America. Needlework was a vitally important cornerstone of female education and creativity in this period. On one hand, it served to prepare girls to take on the roles and responsibilities of marriage, as well as codify the socialized behaviors of women in society. On the other, it provided a socially acceptable means of creative expression to young women. Despite needlework being a critical part of the curricula for girls, scholars have sorely neglected this area of research, particularly within the field of art education. This thesis focuses on two art educators, mother and daughter, Elizabeth and Ann Marsh. They taught the elite daughters of Philadelphia families in a school setting from 1723-1795 and left a legacy within the regional style of Pennsylvania needlework. The status of embroidery as a medium, the gendering of needlework as feminine, and contemporary implications are also examined.

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> One was considered very poorly educated who could not exhibit a sampler.
>
> Sarah Emery, *Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian*

> The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal, and of proving that they have attained it, but it has also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity.
>
> Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*

In 18th century America, needlework was a hallmark in the education of young women. Rather than learning needlework in the home, girls studied needlework in formal school settings under the guidance of female educators. Needlework taught young women literacy, discipline, and a creative skill. The creation of embroidery shaped the refinement of girls, readying them for marriage and homemaking (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993). Needlework refers to sewing, especially decorative sewing done with needle and thread. It includes a range of techniques. Embroidery is a type of needlework where textiles are embellished with thread (Courbet, 2016; Paine, 2008). Styles and techniques of needlework varied by geographical location in the American colonies. Needlework was, however, a consistent part of the curriculum.

Young girls began their education by completing a sampler. A sampler served as an educational reference for needlework patterns and techniques. The variety of stitches

used would be a catalogue of a student's skill. A sampler usually included the maker's name and date of completion. On more rare occasions, it would state the name of the teacher or school (Tyner, 2015). Before the printing press, samplers were the way that stitching techniques and patterns were passed through generations (Morrall & Watt, 2008). Embroidered samplers featured alphabets, moral verses and phrases from the Bible showing their educational role (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993; Tyner, 2015). Almost every girl who enrolled in school would complete at least one sampler to bring home to her family (Ring, 1993). Later in life, women's needlework often focused on the practical needs of the home (Richter, 2000; Swan, 1977). Thus, the samplers and pictorial needlework created in girlhood were opportunities for greater creative expression than the practical needlework of adulthood.

Embroidery served as a powerful symbol for upper-class young women. A completed work of needlework demonstrated education, familial wealth and status, time for leisure, skill as a homemaker, religion, virtue, and obedience (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Parker, 2010; Tyner, 2015). Often displayed prominently in the home, embroidery stitched together the wellbeing of upper-class families and the livelihood of the young women who created them (Morrall & Watt, 2008). Despite being a vitally important cornerstone of female education, the role and practice of needlework has been sorely neglected in scholarly research, particularly within the field of art education.

This thesis explores the role of embroidery in female education in America in order to understand how it shaped the lives of women, codified gender norms of the period, and provided young women with a means for creative expression. My research

has been directed by the question: What role did embroidery play in female education in 18th century colonial America? Education in embroidery imposed strict gender roles around marriage and managing the home upon young women. Needlework also, however, was a source of creative self-expression where girls and women could portray their identities in a socially accepted form. The study begins with an expansive look at how needlework influenced the education of women in 18th century America. The project then focuses narrowly on the Marsh School in 18th century Philadelphia. The two educators of the Marsh School, Elizabeth and Ann Marsh, maintained a needlework school for almost 70 years. They taught the elite daughters of Philadelphia embroidery and shaped the traditions and style of Pennsylvania needlework. Lastly, they defied the notion that women were destined solely for marriage and homemaking. Their atypical lives give evidence that needlework was a meaningful creative pursuit for women.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND BENEFITS TO THE FIELD

My personal motivation for this research stems from my practice as an embroidery artist and educator. I did not discover my medium until my late twenties, in a workshop in the fall of 2017. I fell in love with the humble materials and circular composition of the hoop. I began illustrating my life through the point of a needle. Just one year later, I started informally teaching embroidery. It began with strangers in a local park or for my coworkers in staff meetings. In January of 2018, I taught my first sold-out embroidery workshop at the creative exchange art studio Oil and Cotton in Dallas, where I continue to teach today. I have been invited to Dallas Contemporary and the Dallas

Museum of Art to lead workshops. In my work, I capture specific moments of everyday life. I am often inspired by my own photography and domestic objects. I document passing moments using the slow process of embroidery. I also find inspiration in the landscape and layered history of Texas (Figure 1). I fill in large areas of the fabric with stitches, using color and mark making to build an image.

Figure 1. Embroidery Created by the Author, 2019, Erin Frisch, (Source: erinfrischstudio.com)

In this contemporary moment, I see a return to the value of artisanal production. As a society, we are looking for alternatives to the mass-produced and seeking authentically handmade products in our home decor, clothing, and food. Communities

around embroidery are bolstered by social media and handmade commerce websites like Etsy. Respected fine art museums are hosting embroidery workshops. I see that embroidery is being given public, space, time, and attention. Artists today follow in the footsteps of artists in the sixties and seventies who reclaimed embroidery as a medium to stitch their own narratives and desires -- not patriarchal, heteronormative values perpetuated through women's embroidery of the past (Parker, 2010). What was once seen as a medium that kept women in the home is now being used for activism. While it feels as if embroidery today has been redefined, we must consider that, perhaps, embroidery has offered the same liberation and solace to makers for generations. There is power when we stitch with thread.

Despite shaping female education in a vital way, needlework has not been given the academic attention it deserves within art education. Historical examples of needlework, the young women who created embroidery, and the teachers who guided students in creating all need to be further explored in academic research. The artists and educators who taught needlework deserve recognition. As Ring (1993) states:

> It took artistry, skill, diligence, and patience to send a child home with an exceptional sampler, and many of the remarkable pieces worked by young children reflect the ability to inspire or enforce the discipline necessary for completion… Yet these forgotten schoolmistresses have been the most neglected of American artists. (p. xvii)

Female educators worked in schools to teach needlework, yet little to no research in art education exists about their efforts or how they influenced their students (Ring, 1993).

Understanding the field of art education relies on researching its past. Better understanding of the origins of art education and fleshing out unexplored areas will lead to stronger knowledge. One additional concern of this research is the status of craft artistic media and the cultural value of needlework. Historically, needlework has been relegated as a feminine art. Women's artistic pursuits are historically looked down upon and under-researched. While the scarcity of research is not surprising, it must be remedied. Embroidery provides a wealth of cultural and artistic knowledge about the past and present.

Advocates of art education often argue that the study of art instills holistic benefits in students beyond artistic skill. The historical example of the embroidery sampler offers a more insidious example of lessons taught to women through embroidery that, in some cases, kept them within a narrowly defined version of womanhood focused on the home. The history of needlework art education illuminates how gendered norms were implicitly tied to teaching embroidery in colonial America. Although this study utilizes a historical approach, its lessons should be applied to modern teaching and curriculum development. There are cultural forces specific to our time that shape our actions, like the gendered norms that influenced embroidery education in America. Though socio-cultural forces may not be apparent to us in the present, they become clear in hindsight with historical perspective. This research benefits the field of art education by diving into the neglected history of needlework education, which impacted all girls who could afford to be enrolled in school. This study expands existing research in American embroidery by incorporating close visual analysis of works of embroidery and

cultural primary sources that help define the specific ways that embroidery was employed in 18th century education. Uncovering embroidery's historical role illuminates how it shaped young women's lives and give insight into embroidery's place as an artistic medium today.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

This project utilizes historical research to analyze the role of needlework in female education in 18th century American colonies. The historical case study of the Marsh School in Philadelphia spans primarily from 1723-1792. Historians assemble a collection of evidence to support a particular narrative about the past. This study uses historical examples of embroidery, primary sources from the 18th century, and existing scholarship in both embroidery and American studies. It combines close visual analysis of artworks with historical contextual information about the roles of women and female education.

It must be remembered that in historical narrative research the curation of historical information and even the search for information itself is determined by the interests and biases of the researcher. As Williams (2015) explains, historians act as "craftsmen" building stories from evidence composed of the "ideas, values or artifacts" they find (p. 11). They arrange them into a narrative. Choices about where the story begins and ends and which facts are included are constructed by the researcher. I recognize my role in crafting the narrative in this study. Because no one can recreate the past, I have been limited to study the evidence which survives today. This study explores

an under-researched area, and many of the works of embroidery that were created by girls as part of their education no longer exist today (Ring, 1993). Those that have been preserved were most likely created by elite young women in positions of privilege. This research faces the historian's dilemma, of making the most of what remains to reconstruct a narrative of the past. Preserved needlework, historical accounts of the period, and existing scholarship shapes the narrative of this study. This research also draws from methodologies from material culture to better analyze the needlework that made up the everyday lives of young women and their families, often prominently displayed in the home (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993).

Utilizing close looking, from the discipline of art history, while examining needlework produced by girls in an educational setting is paramount in this study. I employ close looking at embroidery artworks and other relevant artifacts. This begins with close observation of an artwork followed by detailed description of what one sees (Berger, 2015). Jules D. Prown (2011), a long-serving Paul Mellon professor of the History of Art at Yale University, established the importance of an object-centered approach working with artifacts. He centers works of art as an art historian's primary source of data. An advocate for material culture studies, he utilized close looking to analyze both everyday objects and so-called high art. Prown professed that by visually reading a work of art, we could understand the beliefs and values of its creator. I have noticed often in existing needlework literature that proper attention to materiality and aesthetics is not given to needlework. One notable exception is the scholarship associated with the Winterthur Museum and the *Winterthur Portfolio* which typically incorporate

detailed visual and material analysis of artifacts (e.g. Isaac, 2007; Whelan, 2006). In this study, I model the importance of close looking at art objects. I draw conclusions about works based on visual evidence in conjunction with relevant historical details.

Prown's object-centered approach has been criticized by Martin A. Berger (2015). Prown believed that by focusing solely on the visual qualities of an artifact, the researcher could subdue personal, contemporary bias and experience the object as it existed in its historical time period. Prown did not account for the way that a researcher's cultural and historical context could shape their interpretation. The claim to be unbiased as a viewer, in any context, seems unlikely. Berger further critiques Prown; for all inquiry to stem solely from visual analysis, as his model suggests, limits the avenues of investigation to only what can be seen (Berger, 2015). While many scholars have researched embroideries stylistically and discovered their history through relevant primary documents, more in-depth analysis of embroideries as works of art will strengthen the field. Visual analysis can help unpack their imagery, composition, and repeated motifs. In this study, I have centered close looking at artworks and artifacts in conjunction with historical research of the period. Both sources of data feed each other and mutually drive analysis.

The study of material culture is paramount in examining needlework. Material culture is a field of study, and its name references the objects included in its study. Bolin and Blandy (2003) have defined material culture as "a descriptor of any and all human-constructed or human-mediated objects, forms, or expressions, manifested consciously or unconsciously through culturally acquired behaviors" (p. 249). As Schlereth (1982)

explains, artifacts represent belief systems that include “the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions" of a certain community or society. When an individual makes an artifact, they imbue the artifact with their particular beliefs, whether consciously or unconsciously. Their attitudes represent part of their larger society. Embroidery is an important human-made artifact that women often used to express their identities. The creation of needlework was shaped by social viewpoints about preparing girls for womanhood in the period. Thus, the practice also reflects broader societal norms. Unnamed facets of human learning and behavior become manifest through objects. Objects are the ideas of incorporate, which we can see and touch. Something like the act of making can be documented better in an object than in statistical or verbal records (Schlereth, 1982). Material culture is an important part of the study of history because it is inclusive of those who were illiterate or whose experiences were not privileged in the written record. Only a small percentage of the world’s population, historically, has been literate. Of that small percentage, an even smaller subset has left behind letters, diaries, and personal records (Schlereth, 1982). In accord with this study, women’s everyday lives were rarely recorded. Exceptions have been found in diaries and court records, often resulting from researchers’ diligence (Boyd, 2008). “Thus, objects made, used, and manipulated by women within the contexts of their daily lives are often the only surviving sources with which to understand the interrelationships of generations of women, their families, and the communities in which they lived” (Boyd, 2008, p. 395-6). In the study of women and their social histories, material culture fills this void.

Methodology within material culture is flexible but should include some important tenets. A researcher can either begin with an object and then perform historical research or the process. Or a researcher can begin with historical research and then turn to the object of study (Schlereth, 1985). Fleming (1982) identified the basic properties of an artifact to be its history, material, construction, design and function. Fleming states the process of a researcher should follow four steps: identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation. These steps progress from a factual description of the object to judgments made about the object to analysis of the relationship of the artifact to its culture. They conclude with a discussion of the object's significance and its relation to our culture and values. The theory of object-based analysis is shared between material culture and art history. This is due, in part, to the influence of Prown (2001), an art historian and advocate of material culture. In material culture, the object is a central piece of evidence. Analysis stems from its observable characteristics and evolves to include historical context. This give and take between the two sources of knowledge is replicated in my study.

Feminism is at the center of this inquiry. Women and girls almost exclusively created needlework in this period.[1] This study examines the broader implications of embroidery education on feminine behavior. Gender is performative, shaped by unstable social rules that define positions of power (Broude & Garrard, 2005).[2] In this period,

[1] In some rare examples, men created embroidery, like sailors who needed to pass time on ships and turned to craft (Tyner, 2015).

[2] This view of gender performance is influenced by critical theory. Critical theory postulates that "reality can only come to be known through a subjective frame and is shaped by values and mediated by power relations that are socially constructed" (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 90).

male dominance over women pervaded socially and legally. A large concern in this research is how women's behavior was shaped through the study of embroidery. This project unravels how embroidery education played a role in both affirming patriarchal structures and deviated from them to affirm female artistry.

Embroidery has been marginalized within academic research and as an art form. This reflects patriarchal biases in knowledge and research. "According to feminist paradigms, the traditional philosophy of science has tended to produce theories that represent women (or their activities and interests) as inferior to their male counterparts" (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 92). The lack of research and limited historical evidence about embroidery points to its evaluation as a medium and avenue of study. It has been deemed less valuable as a female pursuit, rather than male. Feminist theory legitimizes female accounts of history and knowledge, as well as those from other marginalized groups (Spencer et al., 2014). This study affirms the value of needlework a as valuable source of cultural evidence that is worthy of academic study. Embroidery reveals important insights about the history of education in America and demonstrates female creativity of the past. Rooted in feminist theory, intersectionality is also paramount in this study. Existing literature in needlework largely focuses on the experiences of white, upper class women who could afford an education. I have endeavored to include the effect of social stratification based on intersecting social conditions of women of differing races and classes in this study. Greater research into other areas of intersectionality within the study of needlework education must be completed in order to create a representative picture of the role of needlework in women's lives.

The needlework discussed in this thesis focuses on a western, predominantly white tradition of embroidery. Affluent, white families tended to be those who could afford to educate their daughters. While women in the lower classes learned embroidery to earn a living, examples of their work are extremely rare if non-existent (Tyner, 2015). Examples of embroidery completed by servants, enslaved people, and people in poverty from this period are rare if non-existent. Furthermore, the embroideries created by wealthy young women of status were more likely to be preserved, shaping our perception of the history of embroidery in the U.S. (Tyner, 2015). Research on needlework created by marginalized individuals is a critical area for further study. Furthermore, Native American traditions of fiber arts historically and today are vital to American history. Their influence on colonial needlework and further study of indigenous fiber arts in its own right are two areas for expanded research. Surviving examples of embroidery completed in 18th century America follow an English tradition of needlework. Scholars have linked popular embroidery designs in England to samplers stitched in America, demonstrating the influence of English embroidery (Gostelow, 1975; Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993). Embroidery, however, exists globally with diverse techniques and traditions (Paine, 2008). Other influences on needlework outside of these traditions from other colonizing nations is an area for additional research.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Close Looking: close observation of an artwork followed by detailed description of what one sees (Berger, 2015); an object-based form of inquiry.

Embroidery: the embellishment of fabric with thread or other materials, often using a needle (Courbet, 2016; Paine, 2008).

Embroidery Hoop: a round frame comprised of two hoops used in needlework to keep fabric taut for stitching.

Embroidery Pattern: a design that is transferred onto fabric and then stitched; patterns can be repeated and reused by different makers; they can be circulated in print or hand drawn by an individual.

Feminism: theory legitimizing the accounts, interests, and pastimes of women as important sources of knowledge (Spencer et al., 2014).

Historical Research: construction of a narrative or argument based on evidence from the past (Williams, 2015).

Material Culture: the study of human-made objects (Bolin & Blandy, 2003; Schlereth, 1982).

Needlework: sewing, especially decorative sewing done with needle and thread; includes embroidery, counted work, needlepoint (or canvas work) (Courbet, 2016).

Sampler: “a personal reference [of needlework] featuring patterns and elements that the owner may have learned or copied from others” (Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d.); often completed in school, samplers may include student’s name, date, name of the teacher or school (Tyner, 2015).

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 1

Needlework was a pillar of female education in America from 1650-1850 (Ring, 1993). The first known American embroidery sampler was completed in Plymouth Colony in 1645 by Loara Standish, whose father arrived on the Mayflower (Ring, 1993). By 1725, regional styles of embroidery emerged in different areas of America. Needlework boomed in the first decades of the 19th century. Embroidery's popularity, however, declined in the late 19th century when embroidery was rarely included in school curricula. Samplers fell out of style in young women's education after 1850 (The American Folk Art Museum, 2003; Ring, 1993; Tyner, 2015). Yet, the legacy of educational needlework still existed in the form of home economics classes that taught sewing skills, prominent in the 1950s (Tyner, 2015). Greater attention needs to be paid to needlework, which significantly defined female education in America for 200 years.

This chapter introduced needlework's role in the education of young women and girls in 18th century America as a subject of research. It identified the central ideas of this project, the methodology used, and scope of the study. The next chapter, Chapter 2, reviews existing scholarship on needlework in female education, feminist perspectives, and the absence of needlework within the field of art education. The following chapters explore evidence and findings. In Chapter 3, I explore how embroidery learned at school in girlhood defined female behavior on a broad scale in the 18th century. Embroidery's connotations of obedience, morality, and accomplishment through needlework is analyzed. Chapter 4 delves into the Marsh School of needlework in 18th century Philadelphia. I investigate the lives of Ann and Elizabeth Marsh and surviving

needlework from the Marsh School. Historical and cultural evidence reveals how the Marshes' teachings codified female behavior but allowed girls to express their identities with needle and thread. Elizabeth and Ann Marsh, as art educators, defied traditional gender role expectations and found freedom in embroidery. In Chapter 5, I draw conclusions about craft revival and the legacy of embroidery. I provide final commentary for this study and pose areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Through the Eye of the Needle: Literature Review

> Women have always collected things and saved and recycled them because leftovers yielded nourishment in new forms. The decorative functional objects women made often spoke in a secret language, bore a covert imagery. When we read these images in needlework, in paintings, in quilts, rugs and scrapbooks, we sometimes find a cry for help, sometimes an allusion to a secret political alignment, sometimes a moving symbol about the relationships between men and women.
>
> Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Mayer, *Femmages*

To examine the educational role of embroidery in young women's lives in 18th century colonial America, we must note the state of the surviving historical evidence and how these artifacts have been studied in existing scholarship. The title of this chapter references my experience searching for scholarship on the educational role of embroidery. Only a small number of researchers have comprehensively examined early American embroidery. And even fewer scholars have emphasized its ties to gendered education. Early on in my study, I was astounded by the lack of research in this area, to the point where I questioned whether it was a feasible topic for my thesis. I began to realize that the very lack of research was an important reason why I needed to continue with this line of inquiry.

In this study, I approach needlework with an art-educational lens. I examine the teaching practices of instructors in school settings who taught embroidery to girls. By looking at surviving examples of needlework and comparing it to contemporary primary sources, we can see how needlework both shaped the development of young women and how it, in turn, reflected their personal identities. This chapter introduces existing scholarship and posits areas needing more research. The scope of this literature review focuses on four areas: the absence of needlework in art education research, the role of embroidery in female education in early America, feminist frameworks for the study, and a feminist perspective of the status of fiber arts.

Despite limited scholarship, there have been some significant publications over recent decades that comprehensively explore the role embroidery for young women in 18th century America and England. Much of this scholarship comes from exhibition catalogues, publications from historical societies, antique journals, and independent authors. Some individual researchers outside the bounds of traditional academic study have led the charge, strengthening the field with their publications. Greater scholarship exists on English embroidery than American embroidery. Generalizations about American embroidery based on English examples can be considered acceptable because American embroidery follows the traditions of English embroidery. The influence of embroidery traditions from other countries on American needlework needs further research.

Research in this field is limited by records of embroidery artifacts and the stories of the women who created them. Known examples of samplers represent only a select

number of artifacts compared to the magnitude of works that have not survived or been preserved over time. Ring (1993) notes the difficulty, in particular, of tracking the school teacher who instructed girls in creating embroidery. While family history or a stitched name and date may preserve the identity of the maker, the instructor is typically long forgotten. The samplers that survive today are only a fraction of the large number created (Ring, 1993). We must consider that only privileged, usually white girls would learn advanced needlework, and only their work was usually seen as worthy of preserving. Lower classes usually learned practical needlework for the sake of running a household or to earn a living. Therefore, this study may exclude from the outset individuals living in poverty and enslaved people living under oppression. Further examination of these marginalized groups will strengthen this area of research, but it is made difficult due to the lack of surviving evidence.

NEEDLEWORK IN ART EDUCATION

This examination of 18th century American needlework centers the education of young women. Female educators taught girls embroidery in a school setting. Ring (1993) claims that from 1650-1850, every girl who received some form of education would have created an embroidery sampler. Yet, this subject remains absent from existing scholarship in the field of art education. In an effort to demonstrate this deficit, I have turned to a seminal text that details that history of art education (*A History of Art Education* by Efland), two art education journals (*Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education*), and one art education magazine (*SchoolArts: The Art Education Magazine for Teachers*). As a

consequential part of the origin of art education in America, needlework must be given proper attention within the field.

Needlework and sewing are mostly absent from in a key text that provides a comprehensive history of the field. *A History of Art Education* by Arthur D. Efland (1990) was the central text used in my program to learn the history of art education, as it undoubtedly is used in many programs. In an ambitious first chapter, Efland links the origins of art education to traditions of Western art in Europe. The chapter spans from ancient Greece to colonial education in America. American colonial education, the focus of my study, is explored briefly without discussion of embroidery. The majority of *A History of Art Education* focuses on 19th and 20th century education practices and social contexts. Women educators and the education of girls are on the periphery. As critiqued by Stankiewicz (1991): "Although Efland attempts to be sympathetic to women's issues, women, who constitute the majority of American art educators and have for over a century, tend to appear as supporting players rather than leads" (p. 170). There is a broad lack of representation of female art educators and female education.

The fiber arts are also mostly absent from Efland's (1990) *A History of Art Education,* despite playing a prominent role in female education throughout time. In his book, Efland discusses embroidery once in the context of monastic schools in the Middle Ages where nuns would weave and embroider. Similarly, Efland mentions needlework once in his discussion of William Bentley Fowle. He introduced the new, innovative subjects: "linear drawing, printing, physical exercise, needlework and music" (Efland, p. 75) to what would become the Female Monitorial School where Bentley Fowle taught

from 1822-1842. Sewing appears twice in the Efland's text in a late 19th century context. Once it is included regarding Froebel's Gifts and Occupations. Gift ten includes: "pricking a checkered paper with a needle to form a series of prescribed designs. Another consists of sewing on cards, whereby threads of different colors introduced the idea of the beautiful" (p. 123). Second, it is mentioned as a part of Dewey's four main problems in education for his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. The fourth problem addresses how education can teach coordination of the hand with the eye for processes from daily life. Dewey lists "[c]arpentry, cooking, sewing, and weaving" (as cited in Efland, 1990, p. 170). It is surprising that needlework is not included in Efland's chapters chronicling the 19th century when needlework was very popular. From 1800-1835, creation of embroidery exploded. This was due, in part, to greater number of girls being educated in schools where they would have stitched embroidery. Embroidery remained popular through the first half of the century, until it fell out of favor (Ring, 1993). Greater attention should be paid to fiber arts in future histories of art education.

The absence of scholarship within the field of art education about the history of American needlework is bewildering. To illustrate this point, I examined the journals *Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education* and the art education magazine *SchoolArts*. I used targeted search terms in various combinations: needlework, embroidery, 18th century, America. Within *Studies in Art Education*, I was only able to locate one article that was remotely related to my topic of study. Stankiewicz's (2002) article "Middle Class Desire: Ornament, Industry, and Emulation in 19th-Century Art Education" links the performance of gender to the emergent middle class in 19th century American art

education. She identifies needlework and drawing as markers of refinement. While this scholarship shares themes from my research, the period differs from my focus on the 18th century. Searching within *Art Education* revealed more writings on embroidery, but the articles were, again not directly relevant to my study. Two studies centered examples of needlework from the author's personal histories as the basis for teaching students about needlework and heirlooms (Kellman, 1996; Rose, 2012). in "Researching Contemporary Handwork: Stitching as Renewal, Remembrance, and Revolution", Campbell and Dalton (2019) examine the contemporary significance of craft today in the teaching of art education, and she includes the healing properties of embroidery. Her research is relevant to my discussion of craft revival in this project's final chapter, but it is not relevant to the primary focus of my study. One last study compares Judy Chicago's Birth Project 1980-1984 to fabric patterns from Mexican magazine "La Familia" in the 1940s (Sotomayor & García, 2019). Again, this was not directly related to my research. In *School Arts* magazine, only one article addressed needlework. Bloom (2011) wrote about a high school lesson plan about contemporary Native American artist Teri Greeves. I was not able to locate any studies within the field of art education that examine colonial needlework in America or that directly discuss the historic role of needlework within the field.

Needlework should be included in the history of art education as a crucial part of the origin of the field. In the history of needlework education, we see the progression of skills through scaffolding, advancing from practical sewing to elaborate ornamental design. Creating a work of embroidery requires the skills of an artist, like the use of

principles and elements. As the artist Kate Walker explains, the association of embroidery with a harmfully narrow definition of femininity does not detract from the value of the medium:

> I have never worried that embroidery's association with femininity, sweetness, passivity and obedience may subvert my work's feminist intention. Femininity and sweetness are part of women's strength. Passivity and obedience, moreover, are the very opposites of the qualities necessary to make a sustained effort in needlework. What's required are physical and mental skills, fine aesthetic judgement in colour, texture and composition; patience during long training: and assertive individuality of design (and consequence disobedience of aesthetic convention). Quiet strength need not be mistaken for useless vulnerability. (as cited in Parker, 2010, p. 207)

Embroidery offers skills in technique and design. From colonial dame schools to the boom of embroidery in the 19th century (Ring, 1993), educational practices surrounding the art must become part of the narrative of art education.

NEEDLEWORK IN FEMALE EDUCATION

A small number of researchers have examined the educational role of embroidery for young women in colonial America. They chart the ways that embroidery education taught women the skills to maintain the home in the service of marriage and having children. At the same time, education in needlework did afford creative freedom to young

women. They were able to express themselves and create needlework that expressed their individual identities. The accounts of these scholars have been invaluable to my study.

Betty Ring (1993) examines the educational role of American needlework in her definitive two-volume book, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850*. Ring conducted extensive research, visiting numerous museums and private collections over 15 years to create a compendium of examples of American embroidery. The scale and breadth of her research makes this an invaluable resource, ranging across the U.S. and over two centuries in American history. Ring is a fifth-generation Texan. She married an oil businessman and had seven children. She traveled up and down the East Coast to collate and historicize examples of American needlework. As the book title suggests, Ring emphasizes the girls who were educated using needle and thread. She identifies as many of the female stitchers as possible in order to better understand their education and identities. Ring uncovered many of the teachers working in schools who taught young girls needlework. She sought to provide adequate attention to the "long forgotten educators of one half of the population of early America" (p. xviii). Charting the stylistic similarities of embroideries in different regions, Ring suggests that local teachers shaped regional styles. In *Girlhood Embroidery*, she gives a comprehensive history of the origins of Western embroidery and highlights the harmful, age-old mantra that women's education should be limited to textile production to aid upkeep of her household. Her compilation of American embroidery definitively shapes the field, bolstering further research.

Susan Burrows Swan (1977) roots the practice of embroidery in the broader context of female education and women's status in her book, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850.* A curator at the Winterthur Museum, Burrows began her career with an undergraduate degree in home economics, specializing in textile and clothing design. She did not walk the traditional path of a curator. Burrows analyzes the Winterthur collection alongside primary sources like wills, letters, diaries, contemporary books and advertisements. She looks at the social history of women while documenting their needlework practices in the 18th and 19th centuries. As her title suggests, Swan isolates two forms of embroidery: plain needlework, which served the household and was created by the lower classes, and fancy needlework, which was reserved for affluent young women who wanted to display their societal status. Commenting on the survival of embroidery, Swan notes that fancywork tends to survive through time due to families cherishing it and passing it down through generations. Swan examines the significance of sewing for women in the early U.S. While women and girls were confined to the home and limited in opportunities, they were able to make a substantial contribution to the arts with needle and thread.

Research focused on English embroidery can help analysis of embroidery in the U.S., since colonial embroidery originated in English traditions. There is also more scholarship done on British embroidery than American embroidery, which can help augment an under-researched area. The exhibition catalogue *English embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'twixst art and nature*, edited by Morrall and Watt (2008), examines English embroidery in the Met's collection. One chapter is

devoted to the educational role of embroidery for young English women and girls. It examines embroidery as an educational tool, meant to demonstrate a young girl's skill for her future family and household. Both moral verses and imagery in embroideries reflected women's morality. This exhibition catalogue from such a respected museum provides excellent background on the social context of embroidery in female education.

Finally, a significant contemporary contribution to educational needlework comes from the cartography specialist, Judith Tyner. Her book *Stitching the World: Embroidered Maps and Women's Geographical Education* (2015) offers a comprehensive look at map embroidery completed by girls to learn geography. While her book focuses on map samplers, one chapter focuses on the history of the sampler as an educational tool in England and America. Tyner provides context on this history of the sampler and how it served as a symbol of class. Only elite girls were sent to school and had the resources to complete a sampler. Her book highlights how map embroidery was a tool used to teach women geography, in the same way that images of alphabets promoted literacy or moral verses taught piety. Tyner highlights the disparity in class between the poor who learned embroidery as a form of livelihood and the rich who used embroidery to mark their accomplishment and keep idle hands busy. This book stands out as one of the few comprehensive examples of embroidery research from the modern day.

While these resources help support the field of embroidery education research in early America, much more work remains to be done in future research. Examples of needlework need to be examined using close looking to analyze their aesthetics and material properties. We are indebted to scholars like Ring who have compiled large

bodies of examples of academic study. It is now the work of current researchers to study smaller numbers of works in greater depth to expand our understanding. Specific works of embroidery need to be connected to their specific cultural moments and individual makers. In this vein, this study focuses on the Marsh school of Philadelphia to offer a more in-depth picture of their needlework, their students' needlework, and the relevant historical and cultural context. Use of relevant primary sources from the period needs to continue and expand in current research. Incorporating cultural evidence from the time period that an embroidery was created in will bolster claims made by scholars. Contemporary evidence creates a better understanding of the social and economic role of embroidery. Considering the limited research in this area, scholars can borrow from other fields to supplement our understanding of American embroidery education. Similarly, robust scholarship on English embroidery, likely resulting in a higher cultural value being placed on embroidery in England than in the U.S., can augment future inquiries, although more research is needed exclusively on American embroidery. By performing more in-depth visual analysis and research on specific schools of embroidery, we can better understand specific social and cultural influences on regional areas and individual makers.

FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS

My research is shaped by a feminist philosophical lens. The feminist perspective of this study has been shaped by feminist art historians and specialists in the fiber arts. As explained in the previous chapter, this study champions needlework as a valuable source

of cultural knowledge. Considering the stratification of media in art, traditionally male forms of artmaking, like drawing and painting, are privileged over traditionally female forms, namely craft and fiber arts. This hierarchy occurs despite the fact that through the medieval period both men and women created embroidery. It had equal status to drawing and painting (Parker, 2010). Reassessing art media requires breaking down patriarchal statuses within the field of art history. As Parker argues, reconsidering art with a feminist lens:

> will involve a total rethinking of our responses to the question, "What is art?," as women reject the traditional hierarchic distinctions between "high" and " low" art, or between the "meaningful" or " abstract" as opposed to the "merely decorative," challenging aesthetic values and bringing new tests of use, relevancy, and significance to bear upon our evaluation of what constitutes a work of art. (p. 14)

We must be critical of value judgements and power structures within the discipline of art. Breaking down patriarchal evaluations of the worth of art media and styles will free scholars to pursue new avenues of inquiry. Few academic studies of embroidery exist because of disregard and lack of credibility given traditionally feminine pursuits. In my study, I model an art historical lens that values feminine forms of knowledge and opposes the stratification of artistic media.

Throughout history, women have been socially and intellectually limited by patriarchal forces of culture. This has manifested in women's education in prioritizing learning to sew over reading and limiting the extent of a woman's knowledge. Historically, women have been relegated to the home, nurtured to become mothers and

homemakers (Parker, 2010). Broude and Garrard (1982) explain how visual art has limited the spheres of women through female education:

> [A]rt, through its imagery and associations and through its cultural status, has functioned as an instrument of sex role socialization, helping to create and reinforce a norm of social behavior for women in a patriarchal world. This norm, which has remained remarkably stable throughout the patriarchal period… has involved an emphasis upon women's sexual identity and upon their role within the home and the family, an emphasis that has effectively obscured the reality of their efforts, throughout history, to assume other than these prescribed and limited roles. (pp. 14-15)

Art has, in some contexts, functioned to limit the position of women in the world. Women are typically portrayed in their acceptable spheres as sexual objects and mothers. Embroidery, in a similar way, has perpetuated patriarchal norms. Needlework historically has inculcated women into domesticity. Teaching young girls from an early age the skills to run a household over academic study has profoundly influenced the history of women.

Within this discussion of feminism, It is important to consider feminism's evolution at the end of the 20th century. In the 1970s, feminist scholars sought to reclaim women's history by revealing the biases and hierarchies innate to art history. During the course of the 1970s and 1980s, feminist critique in the U.S. and Britain expanded to look at the influence of sexist culture on the status of women (Broude & Garrard, 2005). With the advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism, researchers began to question the seemingly natural systems that subordinated women. Feminists argued the imbalance of

power between men and women was not inherent but instead shaped by cultural forces. Furthermore, the feminism of the 1970s came under critique in the 1980s for its narrow scope that centered white women. Feminism broadened to become more diverse, including men and LGBTQ+ individuals. All genders are affected by patriarchal systems of oppression (Broude & Garrard, 2005). The singular feminism splintered into intersectional feminisms that included race, class, and ethnicity. Broude and Garrard (2005) state "the very concept of gender came to be problematized as a socially constructed entity" (p. 1). The rigid, heteronormative gender roles that I explore in my study of needlework reflects the gendered norms of the 18th century. My broader discussion of embroidery and the role of craft draw on these feminist perspectives that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

To further understand the limitations put upon women by societal forces, I turned to Linda Nochlin's (2018) iconic essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" originally published in 1971. Nochlin critically examines the limited resources provided to women in terms of artistic education in relation to the traditionally white male sphere of the artist. With such restrictions historically placed on women, it is astounding that we have the number of remarkable, if not as great as the most esteemed male masters, women artists. Nochlin scathingly reports that the mere question suggests an implied answer. If women were capable of greatness, it would have appeared by now. Nochlin points instead to the social institutions that have prevented women (and Black artists as well) from achieving greatness. Not only have women throughout history been asked to forego careers in order to raise a family, but they have also been prevented from

developing artistic greatness. Instead, they achieve a middling level of accomplishment of hobbies. This amateurish proficiency allows them to prioritize care of others over individual mastery. Nochlin identifies the concept of the innately gifted, genius artist as a flawed conception within art history, revealing its patriarchal underpinnings. This "free-enterprise conception of individual achievement" has led to a "romantic, elitist, individual-glorifying, and monograph-producing substructure upon which the profession of art history is based" (153). Nochlin's arguments are relevant to my study of the place of embroidery in women's lives. Nochlin helps us understand the limited means that women historically have been allowed for artistic expression. The restricted artmaking allowed to women impacted their cultural production and the societal value placed upon it.

Intersectionality is another important consideration within this project. Intersectionality evolved from the study of feminism but today is its own field. It examines how social conditions like ethnicity, race, social class, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation shape social stratification. Some social conditions provide privilege, like being white or perceived as white, and some conditions contribute to oppression, like poverty. The ways these different conditions intersect creates an interdependent web of oppression (Intersectionality, 2014). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) introduced the term intersectionality in 1989 exploring the intersection of gender, race, and violence. Ideas about intersectional analysis began to appear in the 1970s and 1980s. The second wave feminist movement was criticized for adopting the assumption that all women experience the world in the same way. It also primarily included the perspectives

of white women (Intersectionality, 2014). Feminists like Audrey Lorde (1984) countered that race, sexual preference, class, and age operated alongside gender. Rather than these oppressions being separate, they were interconnected (Intersectionality, 2014). I have included intersectional feminism in this study by acknowledging the stories of marginalized groups that are outside the borders of this research, which focuses on white, upper-class young women. Intersectionality in needlework and female education desperately needs to be addressed and expanded upon within the field.

WOMEN AND THE STATUS OF FIBER ARTS

At this point, I turn to feminist scholars who focus on the function of gender within the fiber arts. The link between women and fiber is ancient. This historic division of labor between men and women was based on activities that were compatible with childcare. Weaving and sewing can be completed in the home, are repetitive in nature, and can be easily interrupted (Barber, 1994). Elizabeth Wayland Barber (1994) examines ancient textiles created by women in *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years, Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*. Her archaeological work in textiles focuses on weaving. She provides, however, an ancient perspective on the social forces that turned fiber into women's work. Of course, today the fiber arts are practiced by all people regardless of gender. Yet, the legacy of fiber being under-represented and under-valued remains in the contemporary art world. In regard to embroidery specifically, Paula Bradstreet Richter (2000), who curated the exhibition *Painted with Thread: The Art of American Embroidery at the Peabody Essex Museum* elaborates on the status of

embroidery. Richter places embroidery within the recently increased status of craft within the art world and calls for greater inclusion of fiber media. Embroidery if often diminished as inconsequential, created by schoolgirls or hobbyists. The creativity of the medium is sometimes questioned because of the use of patterns, rather than designs drawn from scratch. She counters, however that skill, aesthetic taste, and design all go into creating needlework. Richter (2000) explains the creative process:

> When an embroiderer selects a colored filament, thread the needle, and takes the first stitch into a pristine piece of cloth, a process of artistic creation and transformation begins. Simple materials--thread and cloth--when combined by an artistic vision and skill, produce works that are beautiful, that express ideas, and that communicate personal and cultural messages. (p. viii)

Richter cites Lloyd E. Herman, founding director of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum dedicated to contemporary craft and decorative arts in discussing the status of craft. Those in art galleries and museums must recognize that the medium does not limit a work of art. It is the individual who has creative control of the technique. Fiber arts, glass, clay, wood, and metal will not be widely accepted until we eschew the hierarchies of media (Richter, 2000). Returning to the status of embroidery specifically, Judith Tyner (2015) offers historical context of embroidery, including the London exhibition of embroidery samplers organized by Marcus Huish in 1900. This exhibition was a key indicator of the shifting values around embroidery, leading to it being more accepted as both an artistic medium and legitimate area for study in museums.

I conclude this section with the ideas of feminist art historian Rozsika Parker (2010) and her influential book *The Subversive Stitch*, originally published in 1984. Writing after the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, Parker delves into how the practice of embroidery historically socialized women in a constructed ideal of femininity. She charts how style and imagery of women's needlework from the Middle Ages to the 20th century conformed to this prescribed type of womanhood. "The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal, and of proving that they have attained it, but it has also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity" (ix). Parker critically examines English embroidery, influenced by feminism and psychoanalysis. Using an art historical approach, she argues that although embroidery was used as a tool to control women by prescribing a harmful doctrine of femininity, women were also able to claim individuality and find respite in making needlework. Many women were able to use embroidery as a source of refuge and means of activism. This text created the germinating spark for my thesis. It utilizes British embroidery from the Victoria and Albert collection and contemporary embroidery artists. Her examples range from the Middle Ages to the 1980s. Parker's philosophical arguments about the role of gender in needlework have shaped this project.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 2

In this chapter I established the foundational of knowledge for this study of needlework in female education in 18th century America. The lack of research on American colonial embroidery within the field of art education was explored.

Needlework provides an important glimpse into the origins of the field. Therefore, more research in this area must be conducted. I then discussed sources which highlight the role of needlework in women's education. I introduced the feminist frameworks that guided this project. Lastly, I examined the status of the fiber arts and needlework. The next chapter begins to construct a narrative on a broad scale about the educational role of needlework in 18th century America.

Chapter 3: "Taught to sew and not to read": The Role of Embroidery in Female Education in 18th Century America

> Something pleasing or desirable but unimportant.
>
> Merriam Webster, "Embroidery", Definition 3

> To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women.
>
> Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*

The trope of a young woman embroidering typically includes her alone in the home, obediently hunched over her needlework. The Victorians popularized this image, and it has remained in the popular imagination (Parker, 2010). In reality, girls were often instructed in embroidery in schools by female instructors. In 18th century America, almost every girl who enrolled in school would have completed at least one sampler to bring home to her family (Ring, 1993). Embroidery served many purposes for a young woman, varying from displaying needlework skill to symbolizing the wealth of her family to reflecting her morals. Samplers often included letters to teach literacy, imagery reflecting the creator's values, and moral verses reflecting her piety (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993; Swan, 1977; Tyner, 2015). Only the privileged few were educated in colonial America. Girls who received a formal education and learned embroidery were in a particularly privileged position. Thus, decorative samplers signified education and wealth (Ring, 1993).

For the upper class, embroidery marked an accomplished woman who was well prepared for marriage. For the lower classes, embroidery was a means to earn a living

(Ring, 1993; Tyner, 2015). All women were expected to know how to embroider to mark linens with their family's initials. Before the Industrial Revolution, all clothing was hand sewn, and bed linens were so valuable they were passed down in wills. Marking your linens protected one of your household's most valuable assets, preventing theft or loss, especially in communal wash locations for laundry (Swan, 1977; Tyner, 2015). All girls began learning plain, basic needlework. Elite girls advanced to pictorial needlework. Girls learned how to stitch, progressing through different levels of techniques and purposes in their needlework.

In 18th century America embroidery shaped the lives of girls and young women. A completed work of embroidery displayed prominently in her home signaled that a young woman would be an ideal wife. Needlework represented genteel accomplishment and familial wealth. A young woman who made embroidery had the patience and time to complete a complex work. Samplers often included moral verses and imagery that signaled her values (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993). In this way, needlework was a tool that codified acceptable female behavior. From the earliest recorded history through the Industrial Revolution, sewing was the focus of a woman's education, to the detriment of other academic subjects (Ring, 1993).

NEEDLEWORK AND EMBROIDERY: DEFINITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study focuses on historical embroidery in 18th century colonial America. The traditions of embroidery are rich and varied across time and place (Paine, 2008). The terms needlework and embroidery are closely related. Needlework refers to sewing, both

plain and decorative. It includes any decorative sewing technique done with needle and thread on fabric (Courbet, 2016). In the medieval period, needlework referred to decorative stitches that completely covered the fabric. In the 16th century, the term referenced to canvas work, or counted thread work, with stitches that, similarly, covered the canvas (Textile Research Center). Embroidery is the embellishment of fabric with threads and sometimes other materials. A needle is typically used, although some cultures use a small hook instead (Paine, 2008). The English term embroidery originated from the late medieval period comes from the Old French word 'embrouder'. By the 16th century, the term referred to a free style of embellishing fabric with stitches or appliqué, one piece of cloth laid on top of another (Textile Research Centre, 2016). Embroidery can incorporate other materials for embellishment. They are limited only by the imagination: beads, tassels, glass, buttons, coins, mirror, feathers, seeds, shell, bone, and teeth. The majority of embroidery is just stitchery, stiches on fabric. Thread is typically cotton, linen, silk, wool, gold or silver. Embroidery exists across the world with ample rich traditions that vary by region and culture. In Western embroidery, it served the purpose of individual decoration and marks the individual identity of the maker (Paine, 2008). This project focuses on embroidery completed primarily in stitches with thread. In this study, the terms needlework and embroidery are used interchangeably. In some instances, I clarify when more specific techniques of needlework other than embroidery are used.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SAMPLER

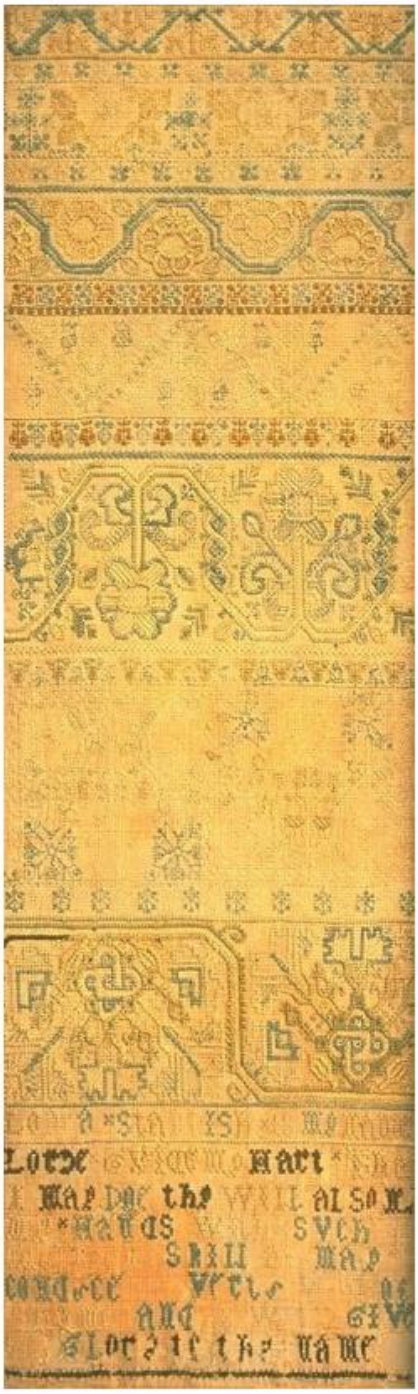
The sampler is an important type of embroidery that represents the skills of its maker. A sampler is a reference work of embroidery that demonstrates learned patterns, stitches, and techniques (Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d.). Samplers were especially important before the printing press and published pattern books. They were the primary way to pass important stitching techniques and designs through generations (Morrall & Watt, 2008). Samplers purposely have an open-ended definition and can include any range of needlework techniques (Swan, 1977). They became a part of girls' formal education during the early Renaissance in Europe (Ring, 1993). In colonial America, the young women creating advanced embroidery were typically white and upper class. They learned advanced ornamental needlework as a form of accomplishment (Tyner, 2015).

Samplers evolved over time to reflect the different trends in needlework. In colonial America, early immigrants began creating samplers, bringing the tradition from Europe. The tradition lasted until the mid-19th century in the U.S. (Ring, 1993; Swan, 1977). Often completed in school, samplers can include the student's name, date, name of the teacher or school. Alphabet samplers were common because they were used to teach literacy. Letters were important to learn so that girls could mark the linens of their household with initials. Versus in samplers communicated virtue and piety (Tyner, 2015). A girl could create a sampler as early as four or five (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993). Depending on the school, a girl created two or three different samplers (Tyner, 2015). Women also created samplers in adulthood to learn new stitches. A sampler would often be an ongoing project. The maker would add a new band each time they learned a new

technique. This type of sampler is called a band sampler. When they were not being used, band samplers would be rolled up like a scroll and put away (Swan, 1977). The earliest American sampler that survives today is a band sampler made by Loara Standish between 1640-50 (Figure 2). It is long and narrow band sampler, 7 by 23 inches. It includes verses which did not appear in European samplers until the 18th century but were always present in American samplers (Swan, 1977). Loara Standish's father, Myles Standish, came to America on the *Mayflower*. Loara was born in Plymouth and unfortunately died at a young age, between 14-20. No records of a school exist, but such an intricate sampler suggests a teacher in Plymouth. Ring (1993) identifies Margaret Hicks who arrived in Plymouth on the *Anne* in 1633. She lived until 1665 and may have taught for 20-30 years. Surviving American 17th century samplers are rare. Early colonists in America had to focus on basic needs for survival instead of the luxury of ornamental needlework (Ring, 1993).

Upper class girls usually worked two samplers, one more practical that included a cross stitched alphabet, and one pictorial needlework incorporating fancywork. Samplers were a source of pride, often framed and displayed in the home (Ring, 1993; Swan, 1977). The sampler was a prized possession often passed down in women's wills. The sampler made as a girl was a unique example of a young woman creating a piece of needlework for herself. After marriage, a woman's sewing would serve her household or ornament her home, in the marking of linens or creation of decorative furniture. These were more reflective of a woman's duty to her home rather an individual self-expression (Swan, 1977).

Figure 2. Loara Standish Sampler, c. 1640-1650, Loara Standish, America, Silk on Linen, Pilgrim Hall Museum (Source: https://pilgrimhall.org/pdf/Loara_Standish_Sampler.pdf)



Pictorial needlework and samplers made at individual schools or under the tutelage of particular teachers can be identified by style of stitches, verse and design (Ring, 1993; Tyner, 2015). Researchers identify regional preferences in needlework from about 1725 onward, as is the trend with other colonial artifacts. These regional styles developed in densely populated areas, like Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, where embroidery instructors had enough wealthy clients and available supplies to sustain their teaching (Ring, 1993). Different trends in embroidery in from 1650-1850 in the U.S. include: the band sampler (composed of horizontal bands of patterns and text), mourning embroidery (pictorial embroidery representing mourning figures gathered around the grave or urn of the deceased), cutwork (removing threads from fabric to create holes and other intricate designs) , and various pictorial scenes that were in vogue during the period (like pastoral scenes, depictions of schools where the needlework was learned, Adam and Eve, etc.) (Ring, 1993). The variety and ingenuity of needlework speaks to its artistic value and the many ways it reflects American cultural traditions.

An important dichotomy existed between types of needlework created by women in the 18th century. Swan (1977) explains this distinction in her book *Plain and Fancy,* whose title references the concept. Plain needlework was the primary level of education for girls.

> Plain sewing included the essential forms of household needlework—the cutting out and stitching of underwear, ordinary clothing, sheets, towels, bed coverings. This work required simple stitches, among them the back, whip, cross, and

> running stitches. Knitting and the marking of household linen fit into this category. All women had to do plain sewing, or make provisions to get it done. (p. 12)

Plain needlework was essential to homemaking. Lower class girls learned it in order to find employment in the homes of the wealthy or apprenticed to a dressmaker. The upper-class girls who could afford to continue their education would learn advanced, or fancy, needlework. “Fancy needlework encompassed all the nonutilitarian forms. Since purely decorative work by its very nature was superfluous, only women in comfortable financial circumstances enjoyed the leisure time that enabled them to indulge in it” (Swan, 1977). Fancy needlework includes advanced stitching on a sampler or pictorial needlework that displayed a scene or decorative motifs. Women who were servants or enslaved would have assisted with plain needlework, in some cases freeing up the upper-class lady of the house to pursue fancy needlework (Chhaya, 2020). The very existence of advanced decorative needlework created by women relied on the labor of others carrying out daily household duties. The problem of class manifests today in the embroidery that has been preserved over time, as Swan (1977) explains.

> Most surviving needlework artifacts are fancywork. This is not surprising, for they were cherished mementos, passed down through generations, whereas plain work was consumed--used and reused, cut down and remolded, until only the scraps remained to be finally used in quilts. (p. 12)

Plain needlework was seen as expendable, whereas fancy needlework was more often preserved as heirlooms. Our interpretation of embroidery's history is tempered by this classed legacy. Our view is obscured by the evidence that remains today.

FEMALE EDUCATION IN 18TH CENTURY AMERICA

In 18th century America, education for young people was a matter of chance and privilege. While class, race, and gender, played an important role, location of the student, wealth of the family, and attitudes toward learning shaped education (Smith, 2010; Swan, 1977). Most citizens considered girls' education secondary to that of boys. It was common for parents to overwhelmingly prioritize a girl's marriage over their education. Historians estimate that half of the female population in the early 1900s was illiterate (Swan, 1977). Within a single household, the education of a girl was often less than that of a boy (Smith, 2010). Even male education at this time was underdeveloped compared to modern standards. For example, a law in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the first half of the 17th century required that towns with fifty or more families found a grammar school. Few schools, however, were created before the 18th century. This means that most towns opted to pay a fine each year for breaking the law rather than founding a school (Swan, 1977). Without a neighborhood school, some families came together to hire private tutors to educate their children as a group from the tutor's home. Girls were sometimes permitted in these classes (Swan, 1977).

In the 18th century, boys and girls were educated in dame schools. A female instructor would open a dame school from her home for the neighborhood children.

Dame schools were similar to private schools because teachers were compensated by parents. Boys and girls began dame school between age three to ten. It was "the early American equivalent of nursery school... which for many girls provided all the formal schooling they would receive during their lifetimes" (Swan, 1977, p. 46). In rare cases, girls could continue on to grammar schools. Others would go on to sewing schools. Learning to mend garments was one of the earliest skills young women learned. The basics of sewing and care for sewing baskets began to be learned at age six or seven. The first project of young girls would be to complete a sampler. Girls needed to be able to prolong the life of clothing since it was so valuable in that period. Unlike today, all clothing was hand sewn until the Industrial Revolution. Girls might learn simple mending or sewing seams. Eventually they would be allowed to cut fabric (Smith, 2010; Swan, 1977).

In school, girls were not being trained to hold jobs but to be homemakers. Girls would be taught to read, but not to write. Reading was an important skill in a Christian context to be able to read scripture. Writing, however, was seen an unnecessary skill for girls to learn. The study of penmanship for boys was replaced with the ability to sew for girls (Smith, 2010). In the dame school, the female teacher taught some reading and math (Swan, 1977). While dame instructors taught reading, it was usually a man who taught writing to boys. Some upper-class families had their daughters learn to write in private instruction, so not all parents thought girls should not be taught to write (Smith, 2010). We can see the link between writing and sewing in the 1801 version of the *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book* compiled by Quaker educator Anthony Benezet (as cited in

Ring, 1993). Benezet was an educator in Philadelphia in the late 18th century. He was a Quaker and had an inclusive view of education. He established schools for Black children and adults. He also created schools for white women. *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book* includes an alphabet of sampler stitches in the back pages, making the link between stitching and literacy explicit (Ring, 1993). Embroidery may have been one of the few ways that women could engage with a form of writing. The verses in a sampler catalogued the aspirational traits of a fine woman: "virtue, humility, selflessness, cheerfulness, and industry" (Swan, 1977, p. 55). Many verses refer to death, as they were created in an age when death was a looming and ever-present threat. Verses were often selected by the student, but sometimes the parent would select the verses included in a sampler for their child (Swan, 1977). The fact that learning needlework replaced learning to write shows that needlework was at times used in insidious ways to limit the opportunities for girls and keep them in their gendered spheres. Embroidery, however, was also a socially accepted way that women could engage with writing, verses, and their personal identities in a socially acceptable medium. It provided an important creative outlet for young women who were often very limited to certain activities and pastimes.

Some schoolmasters in the 18th century educated female students outside of regular class hours. Certain New England schools allowed girls to attend schools in the summer when older boys worked in the fields (Smith, 2010). This fits with an account from Sarah Anna Emery (1821) in Newbury Massachusetts. Her book *Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian* records the history of her town in the mid-18th to early 19th century. She writes the experiences of her mother, father, grandfather, and older friends. Daughters

were allowed to attend a boy's grammar school in the 1790s during the summer, only after the "usual session" when the number of boys being instructed was diminished and just for one-and-a-half hours each day (Emery, 1821, p. 221). To attend, even in this limited manner, parents were required to pay sufficient taxes, at least 300 pounds[3] each year. This arrangement was short lived and cancelled by the end of the summer. Emery also describes the dame schools in Newbury where girls learned at a younger age. Girls attended dame schools between ages five to nine. Emery reports that each of the four schools in Newbury was led by a female instructor. Girls were taught "reading, spelling the catechism, sewing, knitting, 'good manners and proper decency of behavior'" (Emery, 1821, p. 221). While girls could find opportunities for advanced learning after dame school, they required familial wealth and an accommodating schedule in order to attend.

As girls progressed in their education embroidery remained a dominant part of the curriculum. After completing dame school, some girls may have gone on to group sewing classes taught by women in their homes. This allowed female instructors to use the resources they already had to earn an income. They did not have the overhead costs of a designated school building. Schools were identified informally using the instructor's name and stating that instruction would take place in the teacher's home. These schools were common in big cities or large towns (Swan, 1977). Some teachers offered young women from outside of town accommodation in their home, providing extra earned revenue for the instructors. For the young girls, going away to school served a dual

[3] The modern-dollar approximate equivalent is $48,500 (Nye, n.d.).

purpose: the opportunity to learn fancy needlework and the potential to meet a wider pool of eligible young men. Students' ages typically ranged from age eight to sixteen. They would attend school for between one and three years (Swan, 1977).

The Boston businessman and judge Samuel Sewall wrote a letter in 1687 that gives evidence of these early sewing schools. In his letter, he asks his cousin in England to send sewing supplies for his daughter's advanced sewing school projects. They include creating embroidered bed hangings and chair coverings. He asks for "fustians and crewels," wool fabric and tapestry yarn, and explains that the projects will keep his daughters "out of Idleness" (as cited in Swan, 1977, p. 48). Sewall had to pay for both the instruction and the needlework supplies for his daughter, which could often be expensive. His desire to stave off idleness for his daughter is a theme within the role of embroidery other feminine crafts during this period. Handicrafts protected women's minds from straying too far from societal standards of education while keeping them in the home. Typically, these sewing schools only offered sewing. Additional subjects were taught by schools with more than one instructor, usually run by multiple people in a household like siblings or a couple. Added subjects included other accomplishments like drawing, dancing, music and sometimes English or French (Smith, 2010).

Successful sewing schools began to expand after 1750 with more offering additional subjects in refinement. Often, an outside teacher would be brought in for instruction other than sewing. Sewing schools became the precursors for boarding schools or young ladies' schools common in the late18th and mid-19th century. Boarding schools taught both accomplishments and academic subjects (Swan, 1977). Sarah Anna

Emory recalls the popularity of these boarding schools in the early 19th century in Newbury, Massachusetts. “As a boarding-school ‘finish’ was considered requisite to complete a genteel education, these became flourishing institutions” (p. 223). The mantra of the finishing school to prepare a woman for matrimony and the home is an extension of the philosophy of the early sewing schools. These skills in refinement and homemaking were essential for a woman to fulfil her societally prescribed duties. They would aid in securing a husband, the first step in that journey.

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS

We can gain further insight into girl’s early education in needlework in the18th century by examining an artistic depiction of a dame school. Dame school was similar to a modern day nursery up to age nine. For some girls, it was the only education they would receive in their lifetime, whereas boys would advance to grammar schools (Ring,1993; Swan, 1977). The engraving “The School Mistress” (Figure 3) was created by J. Cole in 1794 who modeled the image after the 18th century British painter Francis Wheatley. In the scene, an older woman sits in a private domestic space. She is surrounded by young pupils who fill the room, seven fair-skinned children. Most of the children are angelically absorbed in the task of learning: reading, sewing, or attending to each other. Below the image, text from William Shenstone’s 1742 poem “The School-Mistress” appears.

The dame school instructor sits in a finely carved chair on the left side of the image, instructing a young girl leaning against her knee. In the window beside them, a

stack of books rests on the sill with an hourglass. A basket beside her on the floor could be a sewing basket with various fabrics and a white thread or ribbon hanging out. Though the teacher's resources are modest, her ornate chair seems to be the station where she teaches these children day in and day out. She wears a matronly cap and spectacles. While the figure appears to be a cliché of a school mistress, there may be truth in the trope. Sarah Emery recalls the dame school instructors of Newbury in a similar manner: "Those [schools] for young children were usually taught by middle aged or elderly women, in cap and spectacles" (p. 222). While the instructor is white, her skin is darker than the glowing complexion of the youthful children suggesting her age. Wrinkles appear on her face. This middle-class woman who has chosen to work for a living is not a glorified figure in the print. She deviates from the social order of the ideal women who exists to be a mother and homemaker.

The setting suggests that the educator uses her meager resources and home to do the important work of teaching. School takes place in the instructor's home in the kitchen, a common practice in dame schools (Swan, 1977). Dishes rest on a haphazard shelf on the back wall. Large basins sit below the shelf on a draping piece of fabric, perhaps for washing. A pan with a long handle, perhaps a bed warmer, hangs on the wall in the back corner of the room. A basket is suspended from the ceiling. Fabric drapes over the window shutter. The interior space highlights that this is a neighborhood school, run by a single woman from her home. The teacher opens her home for the sake of educating children and earning an income for herself.

Figure 3. “The School Mistress”, March 20, 1794, J. Coles after Francis Wheatley, England, Stipple Engraving, MFA Boston (Source: https://href.li/?https://collections.mfa.org/objects/100626)

Embroidery is at the center of this engraving’s depiction of female education. Two young girls can be seen doing needlework in this image. One girl stands upright in the center of the print beside the school mistress. She holds a band sampler, complete with tiny stitched lines of letters and patterns. The band sampler has been unfurled like a

scroll, unrolled as new lines of stitches and patterns were added to it (Morrall & Watt, 2008; Ring, 1993; Swan, 1977). The standing girl patiently waits to speak with the instructor, her demure posture echoing that of the subdued cat at her feet. Beside the standing girl, a younger girl leans on the teacher's knee, holding a book with the instructor's help. She obediently looks down at the book where the instructor points. Both girls exhibit modest tractability. They willingly learn from their instructor and contribute to the peaceful order of the classroom. The book being held adjacent to sampler makes the connection between the embroidered sampler and literacy clear. The book and the sampler are the tools used to educate young women.

We can expand upon the role of needlework by examining the second girl depicted hand sewing. In the group of children at the back of the room, a young girl seated with her body in full view stitches on a large piece of fabric. Judging from the size of the fabric (which may be curtains or a tablecloth) and the young age of the girl, she may be practicing plain work, or practical sewing needed to run a household. The older girl standing in the center of the image with the sampler completes advanced fancywork. We see the progression of the education of a young girl from plain to fancy needlework, as described by Swan (1977). The boy with curly hair standing at the back of the room holds a thick book. He reads it on his own, without assistance from his instructor. A girl's education in dame school culminated with a sampler. In contrast, a boy's education would advance to greater heights of academic learning. Girls would either end their education or go on to sewing or boarding schools to learn additional feminine accomplishments. They only learned within the acceptable gendered sphere.

We can consider the gendered dynamics of the dame school in this engraving in one final way which reflects the socialization of girls as caretakers. In the doorway, a disorderly boy rubs his eyes as he is led back into the room in the comforting grip of a female peer. In the right foreground, a knocked-over basket sits on the floor with books and pages strewn about. Perhaps the boy ran out of the room earlier, upsetting the basket. Another girl in a bonnet stands behind the door watching the boy re-enter the room. Even in the classroom, we see girls putting the needs of others before their own. They take time away from their learning to coax this young boy back into the classroom. Linda Nochlin (2018) points to the need for women to take care of the family as one of the reasons women have been historically more limited than men. Men are allowed to think of themselves and devote years of study to an artistic medium. Women, on the other hand, must consider taking care of others, parents, friends, families, because that is the societal expectation. They will be caretakers. Even in this depiction of girls so young shows evidence that women were (and still are) asked to care for others over their own needs and ambitions.

KEEP WITHIN COMPASS

Next, we move from the education of young girls to the image of a grown woman. An English engraving (Figure 4) published between 1785-1800 reveals the central role of feminine handicraft in prescriptive beliefs about women staying within societally determined bounds. In the central image, a finely dressed woman walks in a garden. Her opulent skirts bloom around her and an impossibly large hat with lavish ribbons envelops

her head. Her tiny, out-of-proportion extremities, finely pointed fingers and shoes appearing as small diamonds peeking from her skirt, appear minute and dainty. Even as she walks, her hands remain occupied in industrious pursuit of handicraft, staving off idleness. She holds a shuttle used for tatting, a craft similar to lace making where thread is looped over the fingers to create knots (Swan, 1977). The shuttle is connected by a thread to some ornamental lace or bag that dangles from her front arm.

Samuel Sewall also expressed concern about keeping his daughter out of idleness through her needlework in his letter. The old saying, "idle hands are the devil's workshop" suggests that without sufficient employment, one may fall into sin. There was a fear in this period about what a woman would do if she was not occupied. A woman without purpose may stray beyond her acceptable sphere. There is a contradiction in the way that women's education was limited, but they also were asked not to tarry in their homes in lives of leisure. Male worry about idleness is another manifestation of control.

The woman's idyllic outdoor surroundings include a grand house, ornamental landscaping, and a friendly squirrel seated nearby on a flowerpot. The scene is framed by a large compass used for drawing and measuring angles. Across the top of the compass a thin banner of ribbon reads, "Keep within Compass." This directive is aimed at the woman standing in the garden and to any female viewers. A large circle of text inscribing the compass further reads, "To avoid many troubles, which to others endure: Keep within compass and you shall be sure." It is typical to think of a compass with the cardinal directions when thinking of morality. In this case, the compass is used to draw lines, and

Figure 4. “Keep within Compass”, England, 1785–1805, Ink on laid paper, Winterthur Museum (Source: https://href.li/?https://winterthur.oncell.com/en/distruptors-in-government-230865.html)

its form literally creates a barrier that the woman is asked to stay within. Instead of 360 degrees of lived experience, she is prescribed to inhabit only a small percentage of what is available to her. The cheerful pastoral scene contained within the compass only reinforces the seemingly inherent natural order that her acceptable feminine behavior appears to affirm.

And what happens when a woman steps outside these boundaries? The remaining smaller illustrations in the four corners of the engraving illuminate the sad fate of women who go outside the bounds. In the upper left corner, a woman sits with her eyes closed and indifferent to her cherub-like child. The baby (almost comically) falls from her lap, legs and arms outstretched with his head plummeting toward the ground. The engraver shows the damning neglect of this woman's child, rendering her as a failure in her womanhood. In the upper right corner, a woman faces away from a table and lifts a drink to her lips. Her outstretched arm leads the eye to the table to what could be cards, suggesting that she is involved in the unladylike pursuit of gambling (Swan, 1977). We see her exposed ankle as another visual cue suggesting her impropriety.

In the lower left corner, a woman stands with a chain attached to one of her feet in a stone environment with bars that suggests a prison or workhouse. Her fine skirt has a large, prominent tear. She holds a mallet over a block with straw, toiling in manual labor. Her efforts contrast markedly with the central figure's pastoral stroll and employment in a feminine handicraft. In the final bottom right corner, a woman appears outside in an urban environment accompanied by two men. She reaches her arm toward one man, soliciting him in an act of prostitution (Swan, 1977). Women were not allowed to travel

freely. Seeing her unaccompanied in town in the presence of men suggests her moral impropriety and that she is doomed as a woman.

This moralistic engraving puts creative making and handicraft at the heart of the concept of a virtuous woman. By staying within the bounds of the compass, she achieves the pinnacle of womanhood. As the text at the bottom of the image describes: “A Virtuous Woman is a Crown to her Husband.” Women need the protection of honorable men in marriage. In marriage, she is defined as an ornament to her husband, not valued in her own right. As the ominous words that the bottom of the engraving implore, “Enter not into the way of the wicked, and go not in the path of evil men.” A woman unmoored from matrimony, the home, and handicraft risks her honor and safety. The imperative to keep within compass could not be more dire. The best way for a woman to keep her virtue is to stay in her sphere and keep her hands occupied.

Learning Gendered Behavior Through the Eye of the Needle

To further consider the gendered education of girls, we must take a wider view of how women have been historically socialized into a prescriptive definition of womanhood. “...from the earliest recorded history to the Industrial Revolution -- sewing primary subject of education of girls, both at home and at school” (Ring, 1993, p. 3). Girls were taught to sew to the detriment of other academic subjects. An Italian proverb states, “A girl should be taught to sew and not to read, unless one wishes to make a nun of her” (as cited in Ring, 1993, p. 3). The proverb demonstrates an ancient and pervasive notion about female education -- that it should be rooted in the domestic arts. The

message is that a learned woman is not marriageable. Her knowledge destabilizes the gender roles required in a patriarchy. There was a fear about what a woman would do if she exceeded socially acceptable bounds of learning. These ideas limited the academic development of women and persisted for centuries with the aim to prevent women from achieving their full potential. This mindset prevailed until the mid-19th century when the role of women began to evolve with the Industrial Revolution.

In the early colonial U.S., women's marriageability was prioritized in their education. From the age of five, girls were schooled in the qualities that made them an appealing wife and proper woman (Swan, 1977). A book of manners published in Boston in 1837, *The Young Lady's Friend,* states, "A woman who does not know how to sew is as deficient in her education as a man who cannot write. Let her condition in life be what it may, she cannot be ignorant of the use of her needle" (as cited in Swan, 1977, p. 40). Instead of encouraging academic study, instructors shaping the education of women promoted "the subordination of a woman's mind to her duties as wife and mother" (Swan, 1977, p. 13). Fancy needlework was the pinnacle of a lady's accomplishment, and she would be taught little else in school.

The desires for women to stay in her proper sphere, maintain certain behaviors, and prove useful in the home are made clear in a letter published in *Ladies Magazine* in 1792. In the letter a man addresses his sister about a number of concerns:

> A girl should be taught that her peculiar province is to please, and that every deviation from it is opposing the design of nature... This state of subjection, for which nature has evidently intended the female part of the creation... makes it so

> necessary for girls to acquire a *habit of obedience,* and... makes *obstinacy* [emphasis original] one of the worst faults they can possess… A girl should learn needlework to perfection, but principally the useful parts, and though the *ornamental* be highly commendable, yet it must not be encouraged to the prejudice or neglect of the *useful*. (as cited in Swan, 1977, p. 40)

Initially, the man proclaims that it is the natural state for a woman to be pleasing. When she does not please others, she violates the natural order. He implies that when women are educated, deviating from other activities that serve the home and others, she is in violation of the natural order. The man also asserts that obedience is inherent to womanhood. Defiance breaks that order. This idea of obedience can be linked to the very posture women adopt while in the act of embroidery. Sitting still, bent over her needlework, she takes a position of subservience and duty. The author expresses discomfort with a woman overly developing her skill in ornamental needlework because it could lead to the neglect of her "useful" responsibilities in the home. He values what serves the home, seeing those duties as the only valuable contributions a woman can make. His desire to contain his sister's level of skill connects to arguments made by Nochlin (2018) in "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?". As Nochlin writes, women artists were only allowed a certain level of success in their endeavors. A "modest, proficient, self-demeaning level of amateurism as a 'suitable accomplishment' for the well brought up young woman, who naturally would want to direct her major attention to the welfare of others" (p. 164). Throughout history, women have been asked to subvert their own desires for taking care of others. With the constraints of this societal

expectation, women have not been permitted the greatness (a concept that, in itself, must be questioned) seen in other male artists. The image of a woman doing ornamental needlework portrays subservience. A woman could be observed in a dainty, feminine pursuit that resulted in a pretty final product that would become part of the domestic fabric of the home. The notion of an obedient woman, lacking independence or agency, was critical in maintaining the balance of a patriarchal society. The stitcher must always be kept in check. In the 19th century, proponents of advancing women's education in the U.S. condemned the seeking of accomplishment for accomplishment's sake. Instead, they sought authentic education that advanced women's knowledge. The efforts of education reformers in the early to mid-19th century contributed to the decline of needlework in women's education.

SOLACE IN EMBROIDERY

Despite embroidery being used as a tool to subjugate women and keep them in the home, we cannot ignore that embroidery provided a socially acceptable way for women to explore a creative pursuit. Returning to the 1837 instructional book for women *The Young Lady's Friend*, the same author who compared a woman who could not sew to a man who could not write, also saw embroidery as a source of solace. The author states, "truly feminine employment [has] a moral power which is useful to the sex. There is a soothing and sedative effect in needlework; it composes the nerves, and furnishes a corrective for many of the little irritations of domestic life" (as cited in Swan, 1977, p. 40). The language used sounds somewhat pejorative, diminishing the experiences of

women to “little irritations.” The words do, however, acknowledge the healing properties of needlework. It provided creative expression when women were limited in how they could express themselves.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 3

Embroidery shaped women’s education in both beneficial and harmful ways in the 18th century colonial America. While embroidery was one of the few ways women could explore creativity and self-expression, it also served as a tool in shaping women’s lives, focused on marriage and maintaining a home. While education was scarce for both boys and girls in colonial America, girls in particular were limited in their education. Needlework was an important domestic skill that they needed to acquire. The creation of the sampler aided in finding a husband because needlework symbolized a young woman’s wealth, obedience, values, and education. Upper class young women achieved higher levels of accomplishment in fancy needlework. But there was still anxiety about a woman overstepping her prescribed bounds. Too much ornament or mastery was a sign for pause from some. Contemporary writings and depictions of schools and women making show how women were socialized into a narrowly defined version of womanhood. This conception of femininity is indebted to the age-old oppression of women and limiting of their opportunities for learning and achievement. While needlework is implicated in the restriction of women, we must also remember that needlework provided an important creative release in a socially accepted medium. Young women could express their personal identities in their embroidery in ways that was often

not possible as adults when they had the responsibility of running a household. There was a certain amount of power to be had in depicting your story with thread and a needle as a young woman.

This chapter has provided an overview of the role of female embroidery education in 18th century America in sweeping terms. In the next chapter, we turn to the specific story of two art educators. Elizabeth and Ann Marsh who were mother and daughter and taught the elite daughters of Philadelphia families needlework in the 1720s through the 1790s (Ring, 1993). Specific works of embroidery from the Marsh school, historical documents, and records of the lives of the two educators shape the chapter and its findings.

Chapter 4: "The sweet Freedom I love": The Marsh School of Needlework

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,

Have with our needles created both one flower,

Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,

Both warbling of one song, both in one key,

As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,

Had been incorporate…

Helena, Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Leave me to enjoy the sweet Freedom I love.

Hannah Griffitts, Philadelphia, 1769

Up to this point, this thesis has discussed the state of embroidery in 18th century America in sweeping terms. Next, we move to examine the specific story of two women art educators, Elizabeth and Ann Marsh. They were mother and daughter and operated a needlework school in Philadelphia for almost 70 years, from about 1723-1792 (Ring, 1993). This chapter charts the lives of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh as women, Quakers, family members, entrepreneurs, artists, and educators. The samplers and pictorial needlework completed by the young women in the Marsh School share common imagery and motifs. But by looking at the individual differences in each young woman's

needlework, we can also see the freedom that allowed these students to express their personal identities with thread. Particular attention is paid to Ann Marsh's band sampler, made under Elizabeth's tutelage because of its significance in passing the mother's educational legacy to her daughter. By analyzing the details of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh's lives and the needlework they created, we can understand the complex interchange of gender roles, female independence, and familial legacy of 18th century Philadelphia.

The lives of Elizabeth and Ann offer a compelling area of study for several reasons. First, there are numerous historical records of their lives. Documentation appears both in England (before they immigrated) and in Philadelphia that illuminates the details of their needlework school.[4] There are also records of their students who came from prominent Philadelphia families. Considering the difficulty scholars have identifying the teachers who instructed girls in embroidery, there is a comparative wealth of information about the Marshes (Ring, 1993). Second, the surviving needlework from the Marsh school allows for close looking and visual analysis to identify the recurring techniques, patterns, and motifs that defined their school. The large number of surviving Marsh School needleworks helps us analyze the Marshes' educational practices. Finally, the lives of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh unfold into a compelling human story. Female freedom, entrepreneurship, Quakerism, family legacy and the bond between mother and daughter all play a role.

[4] Records include needlework, meeting notes, mortgage payments, account books, a letter, and a will.

Elizabeth and Ann Marsh deviated from expected gender norms of the period. Elizabeth, while a mother and wife, established a thriving educational business. Ann never married and continued teaching after her mother's death for 54 years. Together, the Marsh women shaped early art education in Pennsylvania. The way that Elizabeth and Ann Marsh's lives subvert the interpretation of needlework education as preparing a woman for marriage and maintaining the home suggests that needlework could provide broader benefits to women: creativity, independence, and self-expression. While this chapter focuses on the Marshes' elite, white students, intersectionality does briefly come into play with a record of Ann teaching an unnamed Black student. The social position of single women at the end of their lives in 18th century America is also explored. Marriage was the ideal circumstance for both men and women in the 18th century, although it was not always the reality (Smith, 2010).

This chapter analyzes the biographies of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh and their unique story as art educators. Next, it examines the cultural moment of embroidery in Philadelphia and how the Marshes developed its regional style of needlework (Isaac, 2007; Ring, 1993). Embroideries from three students of the Marsh School are analyzed through close looking and comparison. Implications for how these girls were able to express their individual identities within their needlework while conforming to the characteristic style of the school is discussed. Special attention is paid to Ann Marsh's band sampler in particular. Ann Marsh's sampler was undoubtedly completed under the guidance of her mother and symbolizes her artistic and educational legacy. Furthermore, because there is such a wealth of knowledge about Ann's life, it is possible to chart how

the imagery, verses, and artistic choices Ann made reflect her personal identity. The chapter next explores Ann's practices as an educator after the death of her mother. It closes with an examination of the final years of Ann's life and a broader discussion of female freedom for women in 18th century Philadelphia, focusing on single Quaker women. While embroidery education may have a historical role in the oppression of women, tethering them to homemaking, Elizabeth and Ann Marsh, themselves, defied these norms. They exemplify the importance of needlework in the lives of Philadelphia's young women. Their educational influence reached far to shape embroidery practices and to leave a legacy in American needlework.

THE MARSHES: FROM ENGLAND TO PHILADELPHIA

Elizabeth Marsh was born Elizabeth Alibone on August 1, 1683 in Worcester County in the West Midlands region of England[5]. Her parents were Ann, who little is known about, and Joseph Alibone, who worked as a carpenter. Because Elizabeth's father was a craftsman, the family may have valued the handmade. Considering Elizabeth's skill, there is a tantalizing possibility that Ann Alibone might have also created embroidery. Joseph Alibone was a Quaker. In 1681 and 1683, he was imprisoned for refusing to pay the tithe for worshipping as a Friend[6], a fee of one-tenth of the family's income (Ring, 1993). There is strong evidence that the Marshes were Quakers,

[5] A greater number of civic documentation of the Marshes lives in England exist than in America. This may be due to a lack of record-keeping in colonial America.

[6] Quakers were historically persecuted in England. They emerged as a sect of Protestantism in the 17th century, but their beliefs were viewed as radical by traditionalists. During the Restoration in the 1660's, at least 15,000 Quakers were imprisoned and at least 450 died while imprisoned (Illick, 1976).

considering that Elizabeth's father was a Friend. Elizabeth eventually moved to Pennsylvania, which was founded by the Quaker William Penn as a sanctuary for religious freedom (Illick, 1976).

Elizabeth married on September 8, 1711 at the age of 28, considered a late in life marriage for the time period. Ring (1993) suggests that Elizabeth was an experienced embroidery instructor, teaching in England before moving to America. Her husband Joseph Marsh was an animal skinner and glover. She had four children, whose names and birth years were recorded in monthly meeting notes in Worcestershire. Her oldest son Benjamin was born in 1713, Ann was born in 1717[7], Mary[8] was born in 1719, and Joseph was born in 1723 when Elizabeth was 40 years old. Two of Elizabeth's children were named after her parents, Ann and Joseph, showing the importance of familial legacy to Elizabeth. In 1723, in Elizabeth's 40th year of age and the same year that she gave birth to her youngest child Joseph, her family of six—herself, her husband and four children—immigrated to America (Ring, 1993).

No records indicate exactly when the Marsh family arrived in Philadelphia. Based Elizabeth's teaching, the family may have reached Philadelphia area in the spring or summer of 1723.[9] They initially lived in an area bordered by Chestnut, Race, Front, and Third Streets, close to where many of Elizabeth's students resided. They would later

[7] The Worcestershire Monthly Meeting Notes incorrectly record Ann's birth date as 1714. Ann's band sampler states her birth date was 1717. This is most likely the correct date since the sampler was handmade by Ann, whereas the meeting notes could be a clerical error (Ring, 1993).

[8] There are no records of Mary creating embroidery. It seems impossible that she did not create some needlework and that Mary did not participate in the school run by Elizabeth and Ann in America. No existing evidence, however, points to her involvement.

[9] A school mistress is mentioned in James Logan's account ledger, discussed later. Ring (1993) suggests that the unnamed instructor is Elizabeth Marsh, who is mentioned by name in the ledger in 1725.

purchase a property west of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia in 1734 (Ring, 1993). It is likely that the Marshes taught from their home or in the homes of their students. No records exist of a formal school location. Beginning in 1723, Elizabeth built a thriving school and business, popular among the most powerful families of Philadelphia. Many of their students belonged to the Society of Friends. There are no records of adverts for their school, which was a common practice for needlework educators. Later, following Elizabeth's death, Ann's name does not appear in the first business directories of the city of Philadelphia from 1785 and 1791. This may be because the Marsh School had a loyal following from prominent families, so there was no need to advertise (Ring, 1993). Ann Marsh began teaching at age 20 in 1738. Her mother passed away sometime between 1738-1742. Ann continued to teach needlework for the next 54 years. The latest embroidery attributed to the Marsh School was completed in 1792 when Ann was 75 years old. Ann left Philadelphia to live with a relative in Chester County in 1794, composed her will in 1795, and passed away in 1797.

18TH CENTURY PHILADELPHIA CULTURE, EDUCATION, AND NEEDLEWORK

The unique cultural, social, and economic circumstances of Philadelphia help us understand the conditions under which Ann and Elizabeth Marsh worked. Philadelphia was a major city on the rise by the time the Marsh family arrived there in 1723. By 1750, Philadelphia was a major seaport that supported the British colonies, and scholars

estimate that it had a population of 20,000 people.[10] The founding of Pennsylvania by William Penn in 1682 contributed to a strong English Quaker presence. Dutch and Swedish settlers predated him in the region who also shaped the culture. Pennsylvania would play a key role in colonial America in the French and Indian War (1754–63), American Revolution[11] (1775-1781), and founding of the U.S. On a broader scale, America drastically transformed over the course of the 18th century due to settlement, wars, and increase in land westward[12] (Smith, 2010). While there is no direct evidence about how these historical events impacted the Marshes, they undoubtedly affected the city and their lives.

Wealthy families in Philadelphia chose to educate their daughters in reading, writing and needlework. Instruction in embroidery would have been a complement to education in other settings. Some girls were instructed in formal schools, whereas others were taught in the home of an individual instructor (Whelan, 2006). Pennsylvania, as a whole, offered increased educational opportunities to children. A law passed in 1683 required parents and slave owners to ensure that children, both boys and girls, were able to read scripture and write by age 12. The Philadelphia Friends Meeting created a school for both boys and girls in 1690. Poor children were educated for free, and families with means would pay a fee. In Pennsylvania, there were more opportunities for girls of lower social class to be educated. Quakers showed concern for the education of women which

[10] Exact population numbers are unknown because the first census was taken in 1790 (Whelan, 2006).
[11] Philadelphia was where the First and Second Continental Congresses were convened, the Declaration of Independence was written and signed, important Revolutionary battles were fought, and the Articles of Confederation were drafted. In 1790, Pennsylvania adopted a new state constitution (Illick, 1976).
[12] The Louisiana Purchase was completed in 1803, further expanding the U.S. (Smith, 2010).

led to establishment of schools for the poor and boarding schools for girls There were also efforts to educate Black individuals (Smith, 2010). A key figure for women's education in this period is Quaker Anthony Benezet living in Philadelphia. He taught the daughters of Philadelphia's elite reading, writing, arithmetic, and grammar. For a short period, he ran a morning school for girls (Swan, 1977).

The needlework of 18th century Philadelphia offers a fruitful area of study. The young girls who created needlework came from powerful white families. Therefore, we can trace the provenance of Philadelphia embroidery and establish the cultural context of its creation. Surviving embroidery charts the development of skill and technique in the region (Ring, 1993; Whelan, 2006). Embroidery in Philadelphia developed its own distinctive style, beginning in the colonial period and continuing into the 18th century. The culture of Philadelphia was heavily influenced by Britain with many residents having family and personal ties there, which influenced the needlework traditions (Ring, 1993). Needlework in Pennsylvania exhibits a unique regional style that scholars organized into local areas or schools under specific instructors. Pennsylvania patterns predominantly incorporate flowers and foliage over other subjects, like buildings, people, or animals. These needlework designs borrowed from English, German, and Dutch traditions (Lindsey, 1999; Ring, 1993; Whelan, 2006).

THE MARSH SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK IN THE HANDS OF ELIZABETH, 1723-1738

Next we turn to specific examples of needlework from the Marsh School, the young women who created them, and the historical records surrounding these individuals.

Sarah Logan, Mary Trotter, and Mary Winstar are pupils whose work is examined in this section. Ann Marsh's band sampler is included because she was ten years old at the time of completion and still a student of her mother. Greater attention is paid to her sampler in the following pages because of the importance of Ann's sampler in learning the skills and educational heritage of Elizabeth Marsh. One significant thread that runs through these needleworks is how these young women used embroidery to express their identities. At first glance, samplers worked from a single pattern may not appear differentiated. But, with closer analysis, we can see how girls and young women personalized their work in order to communicate their values, heritage, and family legacy.

A substantial part of the needlework from the Marsh School known today is a group of band samplers with strikingly similar designs. Ring (1993) identified 13 band samplers from the Marsh School that were created between 1725-1740, under the teaching of Elizabeth and possibly with Ann's help beginning in 1738 (Figure 5). They represent the earliest known needlework in Philadelphia. They keep within English pattern traditions and trends from London. These 13 samplers share many of the same motifs, colors, and designs.[13] For example, 12 of the 13 embroideries exhibit the same decorative border on all four edges depicting stylized Indian pink flowers, a native plant in America, growing on a vine (Figures 7, 9). While the band sampler originated in the 17th century, the border on these samplers that surrounds the edge of the embroidery was an 18th century trend. Sarah Logan created the one sampler of the group that does not

[13] Other motifs discussed later in the chapter include an acorn pattern, floral band pattern of carnations and rosebuds, tiny pine trees appearing at the end of verses, and geometric diamond band pattern which is unique to the school.

include this border in 1725. It is earliest-created of the collection and includes the Indian pink flowers not as a surrounding border but instead in the top and bottom lines of the band sampler (Figure 6). The original frames of these works are distinctly thick and painted dark black (Figures 7, 9). Also prominent in 12 of the 13 band samplers is the inclusion of family names within columns: grandparents, parents, siblings and other relatives. The family names emphasize the importance of familial legacy, but for historians, they have also aided in identifying the young women who created these embroideries (Ring, 1993). We are better able to research these band samplers because so much contextual information is included in the artwork, compared to a pictorial embroidery with no names, dates, or clues to its origin.

Figure 5. List of Band Samplers from the Marsh School in Philadelphia, Identified by Ring (1993)

Sarah Logan, 1725, completed age 10
Ruth Biles, c. 1725
Mary Morris, 1727
Ann Marsh, 1727, completed age 10
Anna Robins, 1730
Sarah Howell, 1731
Richard Sandiford, Elizabeth Sandiford, 1731
Elizabeth Rush, 1734
Ann Wilkinson, 1734, completed age 13
Mary Trotter, 1735, completed age 8
Elizabeth Hudson, 1737
Prudence Dunbar, 1740
Mary MacColloch, 1740

Sarah Logan and Mary Trotter's Band Samplers

Sarah Logan[14], or Sally as her father called her, created one of these samplers under the tutelage of Elizabeth Marsh in 1725 (Figure 6). Both Sarah and her sister Hannah received education from Elizabeth Marsh. They were daughters of James Logan, one of the most influential residents of Philadelphia and a Quaker.[15] Teaching such a prominent figure's daughters surely spoke to the quality of Elizabeth's instruction and helped grow the credibility and reputation of her school. Not only does Sarah Logan's embroidery exist today, but Elizabeth Marsh appears in James Logan's 1720-1727 account books. Interestingly, she is mentioned by name twice. In other parts of the leger, a "Schoolmaster" and "Mistress" are referred to without name. Ring (1993) argues that the unnamed mistress refers to Elizabeth. The fact that Elizabeth is later mentioned by name suggests her importance as an instructor in this period or a developing relationship with the family. Elizabeth's name appears in the account book the same year that Sarah Logan completed her sampler. On May 5, 1725, James Logan writes: "Elizabeth Marsh to acct of haberdashery £9-16-8 ¼" (Ring, 1993, p. 332). This is approximately the equivalent of $2141 today (Nye, n.d.). Elizabeth may have received haberdashery supplies, like sewing notions, thread, buttons or zippers, in exchange for her teaching. It

[14] Sarah Logan married Isaac Norris in 1739. They lived in the Fairhill Plantation outside Philadelphia. Sarah passed away after giving birth to her fourth child in 1744 before the age of 30. She was survived by her eldest daughter Mary and youngest daughter Sally, as her two sons had died at young ages (Parsons, 1968; Ring, 1993).

[15] James Logan came to Philadelphia as the secretary to William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, and became the lawyer for the Penn family (Parsons, 1968; Ring, 1993). James Logan held many political offices, the most notable: the mayor of Philadelphia, governor of Pennsylvania, and chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court from 1731-1739 (Penn University Archives and Research Center, n.d.). He was a successful merchant and landowner who traded both imported and Native American goods and a founding trustee to what would become the University of Pennsylvania (Penn University Archives and Research Center, n.d.; Ring, 1993).

was common for needlework instructors to also sell the supplies which their pupils needed to complete their projects as an additional source of earned income Logan worked in trade and evidently had access to sewing notions that he used to pay Elizabeth (Ring, 1993). Elizabeth is also listed in Logan's August 17, 1727 ledger: "Elizabeth Marsh for Sally and Hannah's schooling 8-2-8 1/4" (Ring, 1993, p. 332). In today's dollar, that is approximately $1,888 (Nye, n.d.). Appearances in these account books give insight into Elizabeth's business operations. It also solidifies her presence as the instructor. Sarah's band sampler documents her name, age, year of completion, and family member's names in her needlework, while her father's account ledger documents the name of her teacher, Elizabeth Marsh.

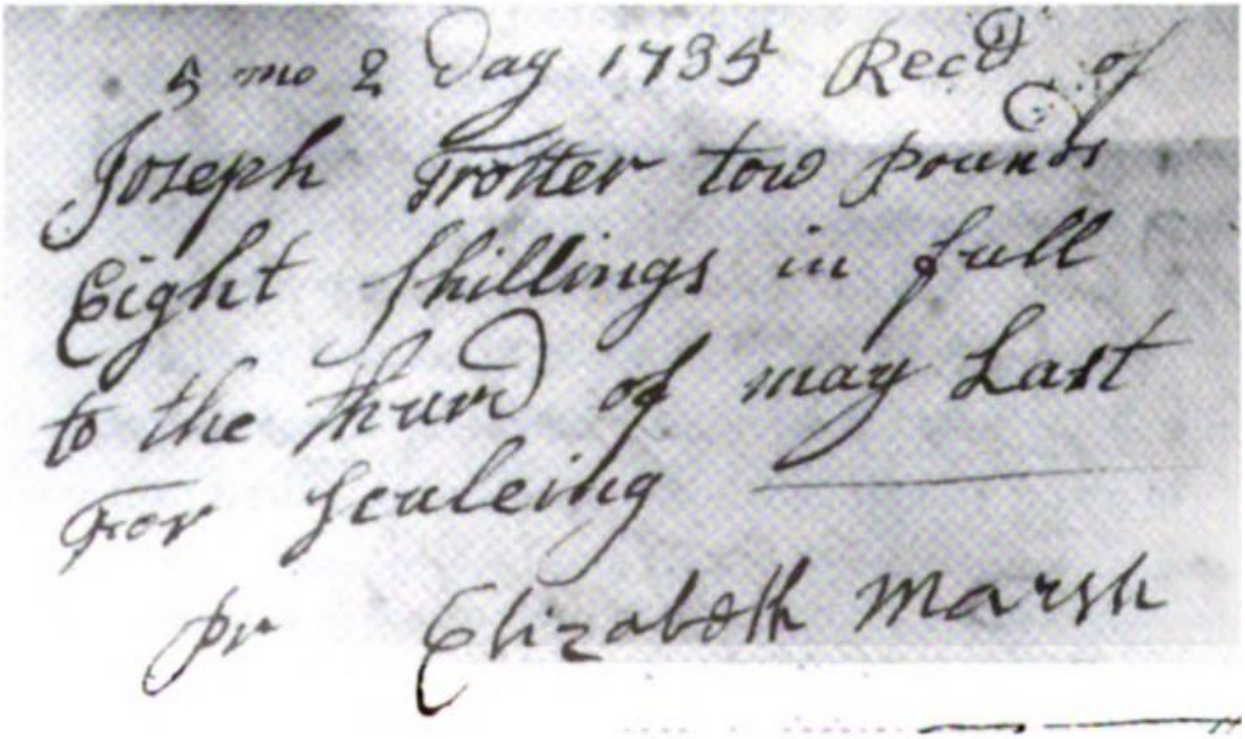
Another band sampler created by Mary Trotter[16] in 1735 (Figure 7), ten years after Sarah Logan completed her sampler, is linked to the Marsh School stylistically and through the receipt book of her father, Joseph Trotter[17] (Figure 8). In this account book, Elizabeth's signature appears, a rare piece of her preserved on the book's pages. On May 2, 1735, the receipt book reads: "tow [*sic*] pounds Eight Shillings in full to the thurd [*sic*] of may Last for Sculeing [*sic*]" (Ring, 1993, p. 334). Her signature is seen below the text (Figure 8). There are two similar entries with her signature from June 2, 1737 and July 4, 1738 (Ring, 1993). These account book entries create important documentation that bolsters our understanding of the practices of the Marsh School.

[16] Mary Trotter would go on to marry David Bacon and had ten children (Ring, 1993).
[17] Joseph was a cutler and ironmonger who served in the Pennsylvania Assembly from 1739-1756 (Ring, 1993).

Figure 6. Sarah Logan's Band Sampler (Marsh School), 1725, Sarah Logan, U.S., Silk on Wool, Fairmount Park Commission Loudoun Mansion Philadelphia (Source: *Girlhood Embroidery*, Betty Ring, 1993, p. 331)

Figure 7. Mary Trotter's Band Sampler (Marsh School), 1735, Mary Trotter, U.S., Silk on Linen with Original Frame, Private Collection (Source: *Girlhood Embroidery*, Betty Ring, 1993, p. 334)

Figure 8. Joseph Trotter's Receipt Book with Elizabeth Marsh's signature, Joseph Trotter, U.S. May 2, 1735, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Source: *Girlhood Embroidery*, Betty Ring, 1993, p. 334)



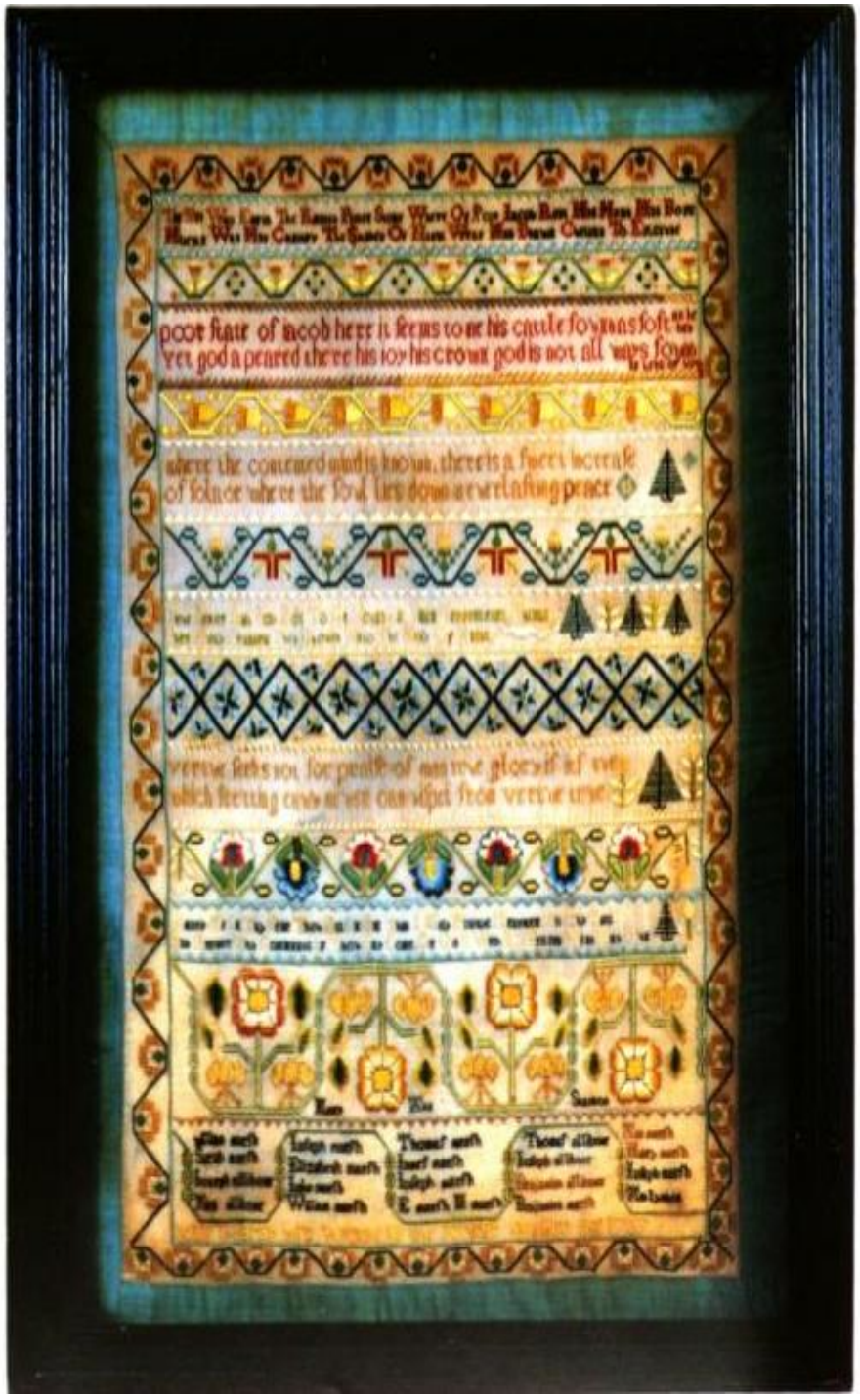
Clear similarities can be found between Sarah Logan's and Mary Trotter's band samplers. Ann Marsh's band sampler, explored in more detail later in this chapter, also shares common features. All of these band samplers include characteristics of the 13 Marsh School samplers identified by Ring (1993). They were probably stitched from a shared pattern, a drawing that is transferred onto fabric and then stitched over to create the embroidery. Each student, however, was able to adapt the pattern to reflect her personal identity. These variations and the student's hand as a maker indicate that the creator had creative ability to modify the pattern in their sampler. Looking at the influence of the maker's hand, Mary's sampler appears more minute with smaller letters

and designs, whereas Sarah's imagery fills the bands of her sampler with larger motifs. None of the verses are repeated on either sampler; each was uniquely chosen by their maker. While some of the geometric floral designs are shared between the two samplers, there are unique bands that are not repeated in their peer's needlework. Both samplers highlight family names. Sarah lists two family members and herself in her sampler, whereas Mary manages to fit many names into her embroidery, following the style seen in Ann Marsh's band sampler. The subtle variations between these samplers, however, speaks to each young woman's individuality. Because the sampler was an important symbol of an accomplished young woman's education, it was modified by each individual in order to reflect her personal identity.

ANN MARSH'S BAND SAMPLER

With so much surviving knowledge about Ann Marsh's life, an examination of her band sampler offers a singular opportunity to understand it. It has many of the shared features as the other band samplers in the Marsh School. Looking closely at where her work deviates from the shared elements shows how she used her sampler to express her identity, heritage, and the legacy of her family. Ann Marsh stitched her band sampler at age ten in 1727 (Figure 9). It measures 15 by 11 inches, and it rests in its original, deeply-set frame which is painted black. Ann Marsh's sampler is stitched with silk thread on linen, with silk ribbon on its outer border. It includes 13 embroidered bands and the characteristic India pink border. It has yellowed over time, with some colors from the embroidery floss bleeding onto the off-white fabric.

Figure 9. Ann Marsh's Band Sampler (Marsh School), 1727, Ann Marsh, U.S., Silk on linen with silk ribbon border in original frame, Collection of Lydia Willits Bartholomew (Source: *Girlhood Embroidery*, B. Ring, 1993, p. 328)



Ann must have made this sampler with the guidance of her mother. Ann Marsh used the same Marsh School band sampler design or pattern used by the other 13 identified students as a starting point. Considering the structure of the Marsh School as a business, students and parents may have selected from a collection of common patterns that were tried and true. That way, parents would have an idea of what their daughter's finished embroidery would look like. Any embroidery completed by Ann Marsh would not only reflect Ann's accomplishment in needlework, but her works would also represent the success of her mother's business. Ann's sampler may have also been used as an example in teaching future students. We can assume that shared creative impulses from both Ann and Elizabeth appear in the needlework. It was common for parents or teachers to help select the moral verses that appeared in their children's samplers (Swan, 1977). The fact that Elizabeth was an adept instructor takes parental guidance a step further, giving Elizabeth greater design influence in helping her daughter create her sampler. Many of the elements included are characteristic of the Pennsylvania style (Ring, 1993). Ann's band sampler highlights the local the influence of Pennsylvania, as opposed to leaning toward the English embroidery Elizabeth would have been familiar with prior to migrating to America. The regional style of Ann's band sampler and the group of Marsh band samplers as a whole could either reflect an allegiance to the local culture or an intentional business decision meant to appeal to local audiences and potential clients. Even though the Marsh family had only lived in Philadelphia for four

years when Ann completed her sampler, it reveals that Elizabeth had fully incorporated the Philadelphia style into her teaching by this time and had even begun to shape it.

Commonalities and Differences to Marsh School Band Samplers

Many of the bands in Ann's sampler follow the common designs of the Marsh School and can be directly connected to other makers. It is remarkable that these Marsh Band samplers created over the span of 15 years, 1725-1740, sustained so many common elements. Students must have referred to a common pattern. Students may have also referred to Ann's sampler as a model of excellence and inspiration. In Ann's sampler, we see prominent, common elements to the Marsh School in bands two, four, six, and eight. The second band consists of a geometric floral pattern that mimics the Indian pink vine border pattern in shape. A central flower with stem and two leaves appears on the top of the geometric vine, and a diamond motif composed of a yellow X with blue triangles appears on the bottom. A variation of this pattern can be seen in Mary Trotter's band sampler (Figure 7) which was created in 1735, eight years after Ann completed hers. The fourth band contains a vibrant golden yellow and brown acorn pattern with the same geometric line as the border. This acorn pattern appears in nine other samplers created at the Marsh School (Ring, 1993). Tiny pine trees help fill open spaces in lines with text. The trees are interspersed in bands five, seven, nine and eleven. These pine trees are another staple characteristic of the Marsh School, appearing in 11 of the 13 band samplers. The sixth band contains a stylized row of rosebuds and carnations. Ring (1993) has identified this pattern as completely unique to the Marsh School, and it appears in all

13 of the band samplers. It may have been an important visual identifier of the school. The eighth band contains a blue diamond pattern with blue and yellow flowers which is unique to the Philadelphia region (Ring, 1993). This diamond pattern also appears in Mary Trotter's band sampler (Figure 7). With access to all 13 of the Marsh School samplers, broader visual analysis of their shared elements could be conducted. Within the scope of this study, we seen clear commonalities across the 15-year span of the band samplers created by Sarah Logan, Mary Trotter, and Ann Marsh that speaks to a shared pattern and regional Philadelphia tastes in needlework.

Ann's maker's inscription, while a common tradition in needlework makes us consider the role of individual identity in embroidery. Ann stitched her maker's inscription in yellow at the very bottom of the 13th band. It reads: "ann marsh [*sic*] her work in the 10 year of age 1727". This signature phrase is often observed in needlework, and appears in Sarah Logan and Mary Trotter's samplers. The maker's inscription is more than a signature, but a statement that records the child's age and date of completion. From a historical perspective, the inclusion of these details in the very fabric of the sampler helps scholars identify and classify needlework. By declaring her age when she completed her sampler, Ann marks her skill development. It is almost like a matter-of-fact boast about her accomplishment. It is a paradox that the convention of including a maker's inscription is an often repeated convention in needlework. By declaring their name, age, and year of completion, a maker is celebrating the unique moment of creation and highlighting the agency of their hands in producing a singular piece of needlework.

The practice of the maker's inscription bolsters the argument that samplers were intensely personal.

On one hand, Ann included shared Marsh School elements in her sampler. On the other hand, there are signs of Ann's individualization and creativity in her needlework. There are designs that cannot be found in Sarah Logan's or Mary Trotter's samplers. Future visual analysis will need to be completed to see if any of these motifs are present in the other Marsh School band samplers which are not included in this research. We can also find evidence of the maker's hand, which makes Ann's needlework unique. These include small errors involving text. Incorporating text takes special attention to spacing to include all the needed words. There is a small error in the first band of text in Ann's sampler. A line from the poet Francis Quarles, it should end with "exclude the light" (White, 1864, p. 106). Ann evidently ran out of room and ends the line with the word "exclude". Another small error regarding text is a family name that appears alone in line 12, segregated from the other names in line 13. The name Mary Ann Stanton appears in the 12th band, above the other family names. Ann may have run out of room in the band below or forgot to include a name and needed to add it in above. Looking at other unique designs in the sampler, there are various bands with floral designs which are unique to Ann. We do not know where Ann found inspiration for these motifs; they may have come from a pattern book or her own drawings. but they cannot be easily linked to other regional embroidery. The tenth band contains a charming, vibrant pattern of inverted flowers in alternating colors, white and red on the top of the vine and blue and yellow on the bottom. The heads of the flowers, stems, and leaves are far more exaggerated in size

than any of the previous bands. The 12th largest band holds a central daisy-like flower with a large head that is surrounded by leaves and other yellow flowers at its base. The flowers are contained by a green, square geometric line with small decorative dashes of blue. Both the small errors and the unique aesthetic designs illustrate that Ann's sampler was not simply a copy of a pattern but represents her voice as a young woman.

Family Legacy

Ann includes the names of 21 family members and friends in her sampler to pay tribute to the important figures in her life. In the Marsh School band samplers, the catalogue of family member names occurs in the 12 of the 13 samplers. Sarah Logan and Mary Trotter also tributed family members on their samplers. Appearing in the final 13th band, Ann stitched the names of many of her family members from both the Marsh and Alibone side, plus the name Ann Lynton (see Figure 10 for sampler's full text). The name Mary Ann Stanton was added to the line above, as mentioned previously, possibly because Ann ran out of space. The names are stitched around the repeated geometric line that appears in other parts of the sampler. Ann used mostly black thread for the names, but a few are stitched in red[18]: Benjamin Alibone, Benjamin Marsh (her brother, mostly stitched in black with the last few letters in red), Ann Marsh (herself), and Mary Marsh (her sister). Her brother Joseph Marsh's name is stitched in black, unlike her other siblings. Seeing the names listed, we see shared family names that have been passed through family generations. The names acknowledge those living and dead who have

[18] It is unclear why there is a variation in color.

defined Ann as a daughter and young woman. She creates a link to her family who live in England by listing them, showing her pride and indebtedness to them. The names also highlight the joining of the maternal, Alibone, and fraternal, Marsh, families. The sampler was considered an important tool for courtship leading to matrimony. A suitor could view a young woman's sampler and read the many signals about her family, wealth, and values. The way the sampler highlights the joining of two families reminds the viewer of her mother Elizabeth's successful marriage and implies the hope that Ann would one day accomplish the same. Of course, we know that Ann remained single. We can still, however, identify the societal expectations that were stitched into her sampler.

Verses

Ann Marsh's choice of verses represents another individualized part of her band sampler. They communicate her values and heritage. Ann first includes lines from the biblical poem "On Jacob's Pillow" by Francis Quarles on the first band of the sampler, text stitched in red and black, and on the third band, text stitched in red. Small triangles in various colors frame all of the bands that contain text. Francis Quarles was a 17th century religious poet who wrote one of the most popular, widely published books of verses in England (Höltgen, 2004). Ann may have included this work by Francis Quarles, an English poet, as a nod to her English heritage. The poem tells the Biblical story of Jacob who fled his family's home and had a dream in the desert where God appeared to him with angels and a ladder to Heaven. The sampler verses read:

[Band 1:] The Bed Was Earth The Raised Pillow Stones Where On Poor Jacob Rest His Head His Bones

Heaven Was His Canopy The Shades Of Night Were His Drawn Curtains To Exclude [The Light]

[Band 3:] poor fate of jacob here it seems to me his cattle found as soft as he bed yet god a peared there his joy his crown god is not all ways found in beds of down. (White, 1864, p. 106)

The lines of the poem suggest humble austerity. Even though Jacob slept on the ground (he is compared in the verse to a cow), God appeared to him. The verse reminds the reader not to covet luxuries. Despite his humble bed on the ground, he was surrounded by a canopy of the night sky. These verses suggest that religious piety and modesty are two important qualities for young women to cultivate. Not coveting worldly fancies would have been a respected quality in a young woman and future wife.

Ann elaborates on her virtue and identity using the verses on band five and nine in gold-colored thread. The lines come from the poem "A Meditation" by Mary Mollineux. Mollineux was a 17th century English poet whose work was published after her death. She was a Quaker, and along with her husband Henry, was imprisoned for refusing to pay the tithe, just like Elizabeth Marsh's father Joseph (Gill, 2004; Ring, 1993). Ann may have been able to identify especially with the author Mollineux, as an English female Quaker. The lines in the sampler read:

[Band 5:] where the contended mind is known, there is a sweet increase

of solace where the soul lies down in everlasting peace

[Band 9:] vertue seeks not for praise of men true glory is its due

which fretting envy nevre can dispel from vertue true (Mollineux, 1761, p. 140)

The verses discuss the importance of morality in the face of mortality and the Christian afterlife. Mollineux emphasizes the "contented mind" that can lead to "solace" in death. The word "contented" stands out when we think about the practice of embroidery. In the moment of meditative stitching, the mind may quiet as we engage our hands. In this way, the contented mind is at peace. But, considering the lack of emphasis on reading and academics in female education, the contented mind may represent the way that women were limited to occupy a confined space in society. A woman may only achieve a modest level of contentment instead of pursuing her ambitions. The verse continues that those with virtue do not seek praise or external gratification. They also do not worry about or envy others. It is ironic that the verse in Ann's sampler addresses not seeking external validation or praise, when, in reality, the sampler was an important display of a woman's skills and social standing. Nevertheless, Mollineux's verses represent the complex ways that Ann curated elements of her sampler to reveal her personal history, religious values, and morality.

Ann's sampler likely served as an exemplary model of needlework and presented what young ladies could accomplish in the Marsh School. While Ann's embroidery originated from a pattern that Elizabeth shared with many of her students, Ann was able to customize it to reflect her family history, moral values, and aesthetic tastes. We should not dismiss samplers worked from patterns as mere copies. Considering the personal

Figure 10. Text and Verses from Ann Marsh's 1727 Band Sampler

[Band 1]
The Bed Was Earth The Raised Pillow Stones Where On Poor Jacob Rest His Head His Bones
Heaven Was His Canopy The Shades Of Night Were His Drawn Curtains To Exclude[19]

[Band 2]
poor fate of jacob here it seems to me his cattle found as soft as he bed
yet god a peared there his joy his crown god is not all ways found in beds of down[20]

[Band 5]
where the contended mind is known, there is a sweet increase
of solace where the soul lies down in everlasting peace[21]

[Band 7 - White and green verse is illegible]

[Band 9]
vertue seeks not for praise of men true glory is its due
which fretting envy nevre can dispel from vertue true[22]

[Band 11 - White and blue verse – partially legible]
_ Me In Thy _ Thou Are _ That I Always _ To Thy Call
And Answre Thy Commands If Thou Say Come or Go With _

[Band 12]
Mary Ann Stanton

[Band 13]
William Marsh, Sarah Marsh, Joseph Allibone, Ann Allibone
Joseph Marsh, Elizabeth Marsh, John Marsh, William Marsh
Thomas Marsh, _ Marsh, Joseph Marsh, E Marsh, M Marsh
Thomas Allibone, Joseph Allibone, Benjamin Allibone, Benjamin Marsh
Ann Marsh, Mary Marsh, Joseph Marsh, Ann Lyton

ann marsh her work in the 10 year of age 1727

[19] This verse comes from "On Jacob's Pillow" by Francis Quarles. Ann evidently ran out of space because the verse should end with "exclude the light" (White, 1864).
[20] Continued from "On Jacob's Pillow" by Francis Quarles (White, 1864).
[21] From Mary Mollineux's poem "A Meditation" (Mollineux, 1761, p. 140).
[22] From Mary Mollineux's poem (Mollineux, 1761).

history of Ann and her mother, we can see the symbolic resonance in her band sampler that speaks to their particular lived experience as members of a family, Quakers, immigrants from England, and educators.

THE MARSH SCHOOL IN THE HANDS OF ANN, 1738-1792

Ann Marsh began assisting her mother in teaching around 1738, at age 20. This was ten years after Ann completed her band sampler. While we do not know the date of Elizabeth's death, the family mortgage of the Marsh's property west of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia helps us approximate the date of her passing. A mortgage payment record from 1738 lists Elizabeth, Joseph, and three of her children: Benjamin, Ann and Mary. This implies that her youngest child Joseph had passed away. The next mortgage payment in 1742 does not include Elizabeth's name, which is our only indication of her death. This suggests that she died sometime between 1738 and 1742. In this range of dates, Elizabeth would have died between the age of 55-59.[23] Ann continued to teach needlework from 1738 until at least 1792, carrying on her mother's educational legacy for over 50 years.

Ann taught the daughters of many important Philadelphia families during the American Revolution, like the Emlens, Herbensons, Howells, Mifflins, and Reads (Ring, 1993). Ann instructed Nancy Cadwalader, the daughter of General John Cadwalader who commanded the Third Battalion of the Philadelphia in the American Revolution (Hanson, n.d.; Ring, 1993). Two surviving account books from the dates 1763-1778 and 1772-1789

[23] While we cannot be sure of the date of her death, Ring (1993) suggests that she died in 1741, based on her belief that Elizabeth taught two young women whose samplers were completed in 1740.

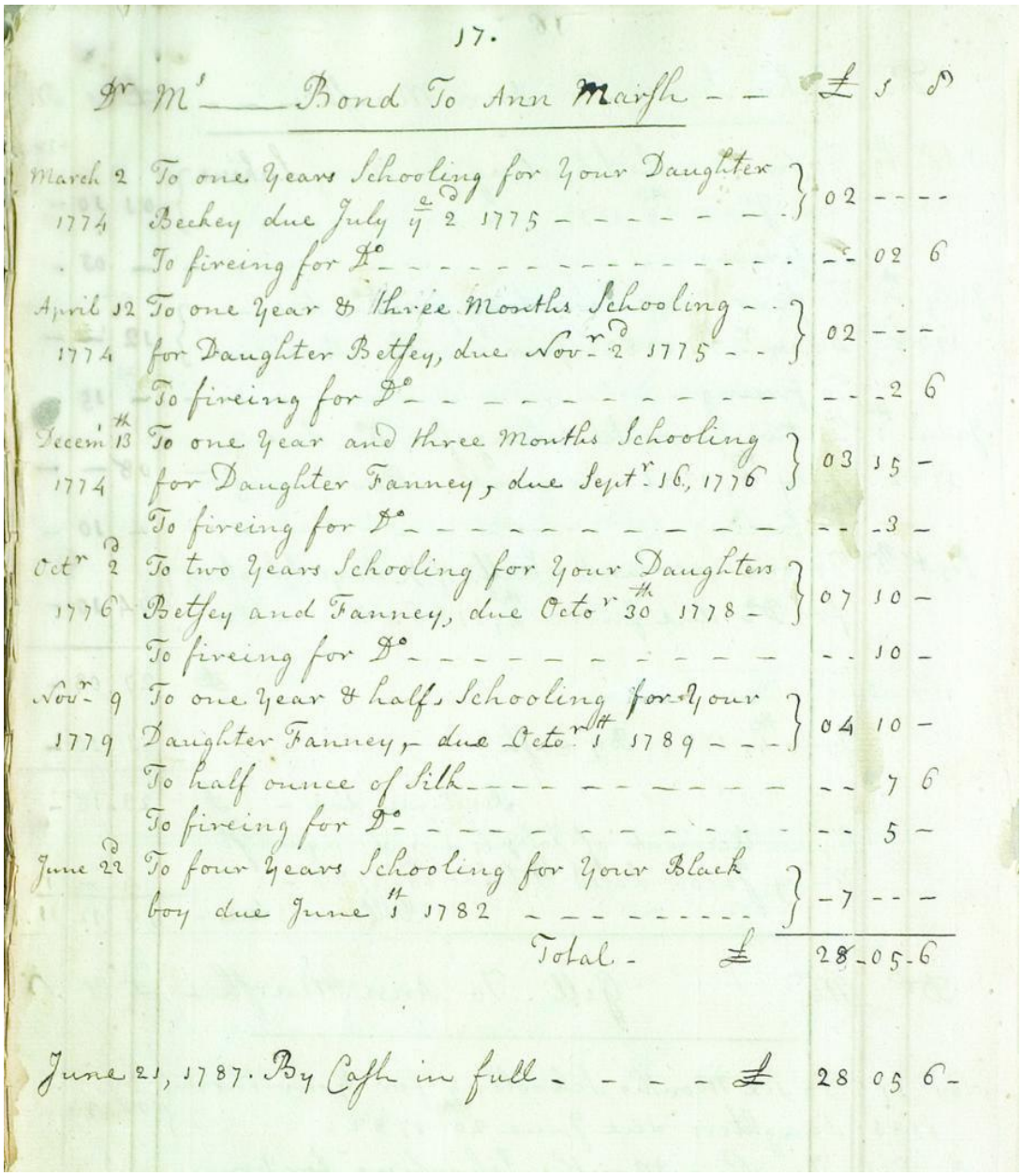
record the names of the families Ann taught. We can imagine Ann's connection to these families, getting to know them through their daughters and perhaps following the lives of her students after they had left her teaching, as teachers would today.

One page of Ann's account book challenges our notion of the types of students she taught. On the account page of Thomas Bond, we see that Ann instructed his daughters, Beckey, Betsey, and Fanney, for four years. The final line includes education for the family's "black boy" (Figure 11) (University of Pennsylvania Libraries, 2006) who is not referred to by name, an indicator of racial inequality in 18th century Philadelphia. While it could be assumed that this individual was enslaved or a servant, Thomas Bond did pay for some form of education for him. In this case, the education was related to needlework possibly for the running of the household if he was a servant or enslaved. Elizabeth may have agreed to teach this boy because she was a Quaker, who made efforts to educate Black students[24] (Illick, 1976). We do not know the details of this boy in Ann Marsh's leger, but we can speculate about some of the details of his life and what the importance of an education in needlework could have been for this unnamed boy.

Several surviving needleworks attributed to Ann Marsh's instruction show the evolving style of needlework at the end of 18th century. Ann supervised Sarah Wister's band sampler of completed in 1733. Wister's sampler draws from the traditions of the other 13 Marsh School band samplers but deviates enough that it is not included in the

[24] English Quakers and German protestants spoke out against slavery in Pennsylvania. In 1780, the state passed the Abolition Act which stated that newly-born children could not be enslaved, and those children would work for 28 years as indentured servants until they would be free (Illick, 1976).

Figure 11. Page from Ann Marsh's Account Book, 1772-1789, Ann Marsh, U.S., Paper, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Source: http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/benjaminfranklin300/06ideas_and_ideals.cfm)



17.

Dr Mr ____ Bond To Ann Marsh - - £ s d

March 2 1774	To one Years Schooling for Your Daughter Beckey due July 2d 2 1775 - - - - - - -	02	-	-
	To fireing for Do - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	-	02	6
April 12 1774	To one Year & three Months Schooling - - for Daughter Betsey, due Novr 2d 1775 - -	02	-	-
	To fireing for Do - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	-	-	2 6
Decem 13th 1774	To one Year and three Months Schooling for Daughter Fanney, due Sept. 16, 1776	03	15	-
	To fireing for Do - - - - - - - - - - - - -	-	-	3 -
Octr 2d 1776	To two Years Schooling for Your Daughters Betsey and Fanney, due Octor 30th 1778 -	07	10	-
	To fireing for Do - - - - - - - - - - - - -	-	-	10 -
Novr 9 1779	To one Year & half, Schooling for Your Daughter Fanney, due Octor 1st 1789 - - -	04	10	-
	To half ounce of Silk - - - - - - - - - - -	-	-	7 6
	To fireing for Do - - - - - - - - - - - - -	-	-	5 -
June 22d	To four Years Schooling for Your Black boy due June 1st 1782 - - - - - - - - - -	-	7	- -
	Total - £	28	-	05 - 6

June 21, 1787. By Cash in full - - - - £ 28 05 6-

group (Ring, 1993). Ann also instructed Rebekah Jones in her sampler, another variation on the band sampler which she completed in 1750. We know that Mary Cooper completed a sampler under in 1789 (Figure 12). A notation passed down with Mary's sampler records "done at Ann Marshs [*sic*] school Philadelphia" (Ring, 1993, p. 342). Her sampler follows a new style of needlework created by Ann Marsh that gained popularity in Pennsylvania. It developed from the band sampler and includes a compartmentalized grid of designs with a large floral border that became popular after the 1750s. A needlework created by Mary's sister Sarah Cooper, completed 1792, is also attributed to Ann's instruction (Figure 13). Sarah's needlework is a pastoral scene with a male and female shepherd in fine clothing carrying staffs (Ring, 1993). The trends in needlework that Ann established were continued by other instructors in Philadelphia. We can see this in the needlework created by Sarah Hoopes in 1799, two years after Ann Marsh's death. The work greatly resembles Mary Cooper's sampler created with Ann. Ann's legacy in shaping the needlework of Pennsylvania continued after her death (Ring, 1993). To fully understand the significance of Ann Marsh as an educator and woman, we must further explore the twilight of her life.

"THE SWEET FREEDOM I LOVE": ANN MARSH'S FINAL YEARS, 1792-C. 1797

Ann Marsh taught embroidery for 56 years. She carried on the educational practices of her mother and implemented her own artistry into her teaching. She influenced the lives of many young women under her guidance. The final sampler she

Figure 12. Mary Cooper's Sampler (Marsh School), 1789, Mary Cooper, U.S., Silk on linen in original frame, Winterthur Museum (Source: Winterthur Museum Online Catalogue)

Figure 13. Sarah Cooper's Pictorial Needlework (Marsh School), 1792, Sarah Cooper, U.S., Silk and coiled metal on linen in original frame, Collection of Betty Ring (Source: *Girlhood Embroidery*, B. Ring, 1993, p. 343)

oversaw was completed in 1792 by Sarah Cooper (Ring, 1993). Despite her skill and accomplishments, in a period that privileged marriage as the ideal state, being single in her final years put Ann in a challenging position. White women in 18th century America tended to spend most of their lives married. By the middle of the century, there were, however, larger numbers of single women due to population growth and changes in social and economic conditions. The desire to find a husband who would be a true companion led women to delay marriage or not marry at all. Women's opportunities for education and teaching increased after the American Revolution. Single women were able to earn an income, own property, and run a household (Smith, 2010; Wulf, 1997). In theory, they had more freedom than married women. Married women's legal identity combined with their husbands. They could not own property and any income they earned or inherited would be subsumed by their husbands. However, single women tended to join others' households and did not have the same authority in how to run it. As Smith (2010) explains, "Although some owned businesses, or inherited wealth and property, the choice for white women was often—but not always—marriage or a marginal existence" (p. xvii). Because of high mortality rates in 18th century America, wives and husbands often died. There were also men and women who were never able to marry. For these households, an unmarried woman played an important role. She could enter the household and help maintain it. Rather than a nuclear family, the home would be sustained by this extended kin arrangement (Wulf, 1997).

Wulf (1997) examines the historical writings from three unmarried Quaker women in Pennsylvania to learn why they chose not to marry and to gain insight on their

social status. Within the Quaker faith, women were considered the equals of men. They had a lot of spiritual authority, which may have translated to unmarried women in the social sphere. Unmarried Quaker women, however, faced many of the same challenges and social stigma as other single women (Wulf, 1997). Some Quaker women chose not to marry because the patriarchal hierarchy in marriage counteracted the equality that the Quaker religion espoused. Some women argued that the love of a man, even in marriage, would violate a true love of God. The unmarried Quaker Hannah Griffitts, who lived in Philadelphia, expressed her views in her letters. She wrote one undated letter to her married cousin, stating:

> There are many of you weded ones who I believe are Placed in your Proper Sphere and I sincerely wish you encrease of Hapiness in it—without envying you one atom… Everyone is not fitted for the single life—nor was I ever moulded for The weded on [*sic*]. (as cited in Wulf, 1997, p. 84)

Griffitts wishes her cousin well in marriage, but emphatically states that she does not envy her position as a wife. She sees choosing whether to marry or not as something inherent in us: something we are “fitted” or “moulded [*sic*] for”. In another letter to a female friend in 1769, Griffitts explains why she chose to be single: "to Keep my dear Liberty Long as I can." She asked her friend to "Leave me to enjoy the sweet Freedom I love" (as cited in Wulf, 1997, 83). For Griffitts, being single allowed her liberty. This may not have been the case for many unmarried women. But seeing that she found joy in being single opens the possibilities of interpretation for Ann Marsh’s life. Ann was an

artist, touched many lives through her teaching, and earned an income that may have allowed her to oversee her own household for the majority of her life.

Ann Marsh's movement into retirement from teaching is documented in a letter. At the age of 77 in 1794, Ann wrote to her niece Mary Hibberd stating: "If you have Room, i[*sic*] should be glad to Come and live with thee for company but how i[*sic*] should get my things up i[*sic*] don't know" (Ring, 1993, p. 336). Ann Marsh moved to Willistown, Pennsylvania live with her niece. Mary Hibberd was the daughter of Ann's younger sister Mary Marsh.[25] Although Mary Hibberd had married, by the time that Ann wrote to her, she was widowed with seven daughters, living in Willistown Chester County. Without more context, it is unclear if Ann requested to live with Mary in her old age or if Mary sought Ann's help after the death of her husband. As Wulf (1997) explains, single women were often needed to help sustain a household after the death of a spouse. While on one hand, Ann needed assistance in her old age, on the other, she may have provided needed support to the Hibberd family. Considering that Mary Hibberd had seven daughters who would have limited opportunities to earn income and support the family, having Ann Marsh join their family may have been a blessing.

Ann composed her will August 17, 1795 when she was 78 years old. She left her money and possessions to Mary's seven daughters. Her will lists money (either 50 or 100 pounds to each daughter), furniture, silver, and linens all give to the Hibberds. Ann's personal estate was worth 1,054-10-1.5 pounds, including cash and bonds (Ring, 1993).

[25] Ann's younger sister Mary married twice, in 1744 and in 1760 after the death of her first husband. She lived in Concord, Chester County, Pennsylvania. Mary only had one daughter, Mary Tomlinson. She went on to marry, changing her name to Mary Hibberd and had seven daughters (Ring, 1993).

This is the equivalent of approximately $136,000 in today's dollars (Nye, n.d.). The Chester County Historical Society has many examples of needlework made by Ann herself. They were most likely passed down in her will. These surviving needleworks include: a floral pictorial embroidery, a needle cushion with tassels on the corners embroidered with a central flower and ornate vines, two red chair cushions covered in bright floral embroidery, and a fabric needle case embellished with embroidery and beads (Lindsey, 1999). These works may have been examples that Ann used in her teaching, to show to parents and students as examples. Or they may have been personal expressions of creativity that filled her life and home.

Ann Marsh died in 1797 at the age of 80 (Ring, 1993). Ann's life was surely as rich as her elaborate works of embroidery. She must be celebrated as a pioneer independent female business owner and art educator. Her meaningful life was long, impactful upon the students and families she taught, and shows that needlework could be empowering to women.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 4

Through detailed analysis of the needlework and historical records surrounding Ann and Elizabeth Marsh, we can piece together the practices and motivations of the two art educators who led the Marsh School of needlework. Historical context of 18th century social standards and gender roles shaped the way that they instructed young women in needlework. The accomplishment, morality, and values displayed by young women in their embroidery were considered an important step to securing a husband and the

security marriage provided. While the samplers made by students in the Marsh School contribute to the overall mechanism of preparing a woman to be wife and mother, there was also creative agency in the choices that young women made when stitching. As we see in the example of Ann's band sampler, her decisions while making walked the line between conforming to these ideals while allowing her to reflect on the elements that define her: religion, gender, heritage, location, and family legacy. Ann's band sampler represents an important link between Ann and Elizabeth. Not only was Elizabeth imparting the skills for Ann to become a self-sufficient instructor, but she also taught Ann how to sustain an income-generating educational business which would prove to shape the regional style of embroidery in Philadelphia.

The way that Elizabeth and Ann Marsh lived further eschews the 18th century social mandate to depend on a husband for financial security and social prestige. Elizabeth married and was a mother to four children. Yet, she also earned an income as an educator and played an influential role shaping the daughters of the Philadelphia elite and Pennsylvania needlework. Ann, who remained single, nevertheless, was able to sustain a profession on her own. Ann taught needlework for over 50 years and continued her mother's legacy, further shaping the needlework tastes and traditions of Pennsylvania. Despite Ann's need for support in her old age, we see the fruitful artistic legacy that Elizabeth and Ann were able to create that still holds resonance today.

By looking more closely at historical works of embroidery, we can identify how makers used imagery, words, colors, and choice in stitches to reflect their identities. There we can see individual agency, even if the creator was working from a pattern or

had guidance from an instructor. We must better craft an understanding of the historical and social context of embroidery in specific regions and link them to the specific makers and instructors. Through this research, we have been able to glimpse the lived experiences of Ann and Elizabeth as educators, artists, entrepreneurs, and women. But we can only know as much as the artifacts reveal. There is a need for further research into additional details of the Marshes' lives and to uncover the stories of other needlework art educators who shaped the education of young girls across the United States.

Chapter 5: Regeneration and Considerations: Conclusion

> When I was growing up, all the women in my house were using needles. I have always had a fascination with the needle, the magic power of the needle.
>
> Louise Bourgeois, *Blue Days and Pink Days Exhibition Catalogue*

> The moment past is extinguished forever save for the things made by it.
>
> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*

Embroidery and Craft Revival

As this study concludes, I would like to consider embroidery of the present and its significance in today's culture. We are in a modern craft movement, where there is a longing to return to the handmade and to create ourselves. We are currently in the COVID-19 pandemic. People are isolated in their homes, relying on screens for communication. We have been deprived of in-person social, cultural experiences for over a year. When our lives are increasingly focused on technology, many look to craft as a means to return to the tangible world. Moving away from the digital, craft provides tactile experiences. Craft represents returning to a simpler time (Peach, 2013). While craft can be completed in isolation, which explains its surge in popularity during the 2020 pandemic (Gusti, 2020), makers today are also turning to the internet to build crafting communities which have been key to its revival (Peach, 2013). There is a better exchange of ideas and connection of people from across the world. On Instagram, the

#coronacrafting hashtag has unified makers who want to share their work (Gusti, 2020). In this way, the craft movement both rejects and embraces technology (Peach, 2013).

Seeking to make and purchase artisan goods also represents a dissatisfaction with consumerism and the social and environmental impact of mass production (Peach, 2013). Buyers of craft are seeking ethically made products that are sustainably produced. Renewed interest in craft also coincides with financial recession -- in 1973, 2009, 2020 (Parker, 2010; Peach, 2013). Creating something by hand provides hours of engagement with little cost. It also encourages repurposing materials from home which saves money. Craft businesses sometimes withstand recession (Peach, 2013). Etsy, an online marketplace for creative goods and supplies whose sellers are entrepreneurs and small business owners, saw incredible growth during the pandemic and accompanying economic recession (Gusti, 2020). Both customers and sellers grew (Manfredi, 2020). Etsy's gross marketplace sales in the fourth quarter of 2020 reached $3.6 billion, increasing by 118% from its pre-pandemic fourth quarter 2019 sales of $1.6 billion (Etsy Inc.). Etsy had a 138% increase in craft supply sales specifically from March 2020 to August 2020. Masks, home goods, and accessories were other categories for growth (Manfredi, 2020). Between March 2020 and May 2020, Google reported a 100% increase in searches for embroidery kits (Gusti, 2020).

Craft has been used to incite change and promote personal healing. Craft often appears in times of social and economic instability. Craft can be used for protest or as a salve for the challenges of the modern industrial world (Peach, 2013). It has been used in political movements like feminism and environmentalism and gives the disenfranchised

voice and collective agency (Peach, 2013). In 2003, Betsy Greer created the term Craftivism, which combines craft and activism, to explain the use of craft in seeking social and political change. Craftivist art often ironically references the past, indulging in the traditional forms of craft mediums while delivering a contemporary, radical message. In 2020, artist Diana Weymar organized the Tiny Pricks Project. Weymar invited stitchers all over the world to embroider the words of Donald Trump onto traditional textiles, such as handkerchiefs and doilies, creating a material record of his presidency and the movement against it (Figure 14). In addition to promoting political change,

Figure 14. Diana Weymar, Tiny Pricks Project, 2020 (Source: https://www.ft.com/content/52a6cfb7-0dbf-4e7d-9767-9462cddcf005)

needlework is seen as healing for the mind and body. It can be used as a journal or personal record. During World War II, Lady Smith-Dorrien, the principal of the Royal School of Needlework urged in a press release: “With stitch you need to put in such concentration that the rest of your body and your mind are allowed to heal” (as cited in Gusti, 2020). The posture of bent-over concentration which was a symbol of confining women to the home has, today, been reclaimed as a meditative pose where creativity and healing can flourish.

The legacy of historic samplers stitched in schools and the broader fiber material culture of the past still affects us today. As someone who is fascinated by the past, I often find myself in thrift stores. I am usually drawn to the textiles and clothing that were created by hand. I imagine the maker and the hours of effort put into a single quilt, crocheted blanket, or hand-embroidered shirt. I usually want to take these items home so that they will no longer be hanging forgotten on a flimsy wire hanger with a handwritten stapled-on price tag. The stories told by our hands through countless stitches deserve to be remembered, preserved, and honored. In the same vein, when I teach embroidery workshops, many of my students tell me the stories of their loved ones who created needlework. Stories about the grandmother who embroidered a resplendent, beaded peacock onto a drawstring bag that her granddaughter still carries. Stories about the woman who stitched flowers on her denim shorts in the sixties and returned to the art later in life. I have heard about childhood Sunday mornings spent learning bargello[26]

[26] A type of needlework also called Florentine canvas work that relies on flat stitches to create geometric designs which existed as early as the 17th century in Florence and was revived in the 1960s (Bargello work, 2019; Ireys, 1972).

from a grandmother and seen revered embroidered family heirlooms. Hearing these glimpses into my students' family histories are some of the most rewarding moments of my artistic practice. Students tell me with pride and nostalgia about the items that their loved ones created. They tell me the focus and creativity of the makers. I take their stories with me, keeping them near. We are in a contemporary age that is reverting back to artisanal production. During the pandemic, we have reclaimed the power of the handmade and rediscovered the solace of making in a time when we needed healing from a transformed world.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In this study, I sought to use historical methodology, relying on needlework, historical documents, artworks, and primary sources to understand how embroidery played a role in female education. I implemented visual analysis of both embroidery and relevant artworks to establish a methodology of close looking and reading of these artifacts and their implications for the history of art education in America. Needlework played a vital part in transforming young women into their prescribed roles of mother and wife. 18th century embroidery had the symbolic purpose of representing a young woman's identity. It taught her skills for homemaking, signified familial legacy, communicated her morality, and demonstrated obedience and patience. So much could be contained in a single sampler. I looked to educators Elizabeth and Ann Marsh as a historical case study to see how two women used needle and thread to shape the education of their students. Their compelling personal story as a mother and daughter,

artists, entrepreneurs, and educators shows the critical need to preserve and highlight the history of needlework so that we can know the stories of more art educators like them. Needlework needs to be included in the history of art education. Since the inception of colonial American education, girls learned the art of embroidery. The relevance of the artform continues to resurface, shaping the field of art education.

In the 18th century U.S., the limited education that upper-class women received typically included training in needlework. They would first be taught the fundamentals essential to running a household, plain needlework, and then proceed to the more extravagant, decorative fancy needlework, which professed their abilities as accomplished young women. Prioritizing needlework in girl's education was often to the detriment of academic subjects. Therefore, it was a patriarchal tool that restricted women's learning. Women were hugely limited in the activities and lifestyle that was deemed appropriate for them, as can be seen in explicit detail in the print "Keep within Compass." Embroidery and other crafts were used as means to justify keeping the woman safe within the home and preventing idleness. Idleness represents the fear of an empowered woman who would escape her sphere, as prescribed by societal norms, and would find pursuits beyond being a wife and mother. Examining needlework provides insight into the educational practices of colonial America. Female education in needlework in particular has been a neglected topic, in the same way that girl's academic education was typically not a priority for parents in the American colonies (Swan, 1977). Girls, however, were taught embroidery--both a practical skill and a creative art.

Examining the evidence surrounding Elizabeth and Ann Marsh leads to a rich study because we have multiple accounts pointing to evidence about their needlework school and educational practices. We can gain insight into them as people, remarkable women who immigrated to America, lived in Philadelphia during the tumultuous French and Indian War and American Revolution, and provided meaningful art education to the daughters of elite Philadelphia families. In the embroideries made by Ann and the Marsh School students, we see expressions of morality, values, religion, and family legacy. Ann's needlework especially represents the passing down of Elizabeth's knowledge and skills, as both a mother and educator. Ann would one day teach beside her mother and then be entrusted with the school, so her education in embroidery holds a special significance. The history of the Marsh School holds relevance today and bolsters our understanding of women's embroidery education in the 18th century America. Their story is also a human one of immigration, entrepreneurship, loss, family, and legacy. The remarkable lives of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh point to how needlework was a source of creativity and freedom for two women who lived outside of the bounds prescribed by society. The stories of embroidery art educators must continue to be told and championed.

Upper class girls were taught both the artistic and practical skills of needlework in school settings throughout the U.S. colonies, yet why has this area of study been neglected in art education and art historical research? First, the association of embroidery with femininity has trivialized its importance. As a feminine pursuit, it has not been valued as a source of knowledge worthy of research. It provides a vital resource with

insight into the techniques, creativity, morals, and values of 18th century people. Second, in the art world, embroidery is not given the same credence as a medium as other traditional, historically gendered male, mediums like painting and drawing. As a fiber art and historically considered a craft, embroidery does not garner the respect it deserves in the art world. As we see in the embrace of craft as a form of high art, the medium should not determine the status of a work (Richter, 2000). Medium is a flexible means that is used to convey an idea, not the pre-determiner of the value of a work of art. Third, without proper regard for the rich history that needlework provides, it will fade with age. Examples of needlework will not be preserved. Scholarship will not continue. Growing the field of the study of needlework is the only way to ensure that its legacy will endure. The artists who made the needlework and the art educators who guided them, otherwise, will be forgotten over time.

The medium of embroidery was encoded as feminine in the 16th century which was solidified during the Victorian era. Dating back to the Middle Ages, both men and women embroidered in guilds and the art shared the same status as drawing and painting. With the rigid gender spheres that were compartmentalized in the 19th century, embroidery became encoded as a tenet of femininity. As Parker (2010) explains, "embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another" (p. 6). This collapse has ramifications for the status of embroidery as a less respected medium and the use of embroidery in female education to inculcate gender norms.

The very status and creativity of needlework is still in question by scholars today. Debate continues as to the creative nature of embroidery work. Were students simply

copying the directives of their instructors or was their room for creative license? For that matter, what parental and societal influences shaped the embroidery of young women and girls? Considering the marginalization of needlework and fiber arts in general, we should not indulge in debates that perpetuate patriarchal ideas about singular artistic genius or that places artistic media into hierarchies. Embroidery has been seen as innately less valued of a medium since it was gendered as feminine (Parker, 2010). We need to work against this evaluation in order to give embroidery equal status with other mediums.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF STUDY

Lack of Existing Research

Early on in my study, I found the lack of research in this area astounding. I questioned whether needlework in female education was a feasible topic of study. However, I realized that the deficiency in research was a critical reason why I should continue with this investigation. I look at the gumption of a scholar like Betty Ring who took it upon herself to conduct 15 years of research and published *Girlhood Embroidery*, not as an academic but as someone with a resounding passion for needlework, a medium that desperately needed to be documented. In writing this thesis, I add my voice to her work and to the work of two other giants, Susan Burrows Swan, curator of the Winterthur Museum who worked there for 30 years, and Rozsika Parker, the British art historian and psychoanalyst. I stand on their shoulders. In my research, I slowly discovered other publications from museum exhibition catalogues that ranged widely in both publication date and source. They came from museum exhibition catalogues, historical societies, and

antique journals. While there is a consistent stream of research, the number of studies in needlework should be increased in order to delve into the understudied areas within the field and uncover diverse stories within needlework education.

This research should be incorporated into major art education, historical, and art journals, reflecting the broad impact of needlework as a cultural practice. Writing this study, I found myself constantly falling down rabbit holes filled with fascinating information. In this under-developed field of needlework in art education, there are boundless opportunities for future directions. Most importantly, there must be more examinations of specific young women who created embroideries and specific instructors. There are so many more stories of needlework educators and makers to discover. We must understand the regional, historical, and social contexts that shaped the creation of embroidery. These contexts will make scholarly claims more robust and deepen our knowledge of the function of needlework in America. and specific period in question. Future studies must also incorporate close looking, visual analysis, and comparison of works of embroidery.[27] This will help us see the specific similarities and differences between works of art and establish regional styles or schools of embroideries that share commonalities.

Class and Race

This research examines the embroidery created by upper class, white girls and women. This is a complex problem at the heart of this study. There are different reasons

[27] Whelan (2006) provides an excellent model in her research of Philadelphia Tree of Life embroideries at the Winterthur Museum.

why we are left with this selective legacy of needlework. First, only privileged women received education of any kind and especially in advanced forms of needlework. In fact, the presence of a servant or enslaved person in the home is often what gave women enough time to pursue the slow art of needlework (Chhaya, 2020). While lower class women would have learned plain needlework, they would do so in order to earn a living or make the necessary mending and labelling of linens required for the upkeep of the home. They did not create the lavish decorative embroideries made by upper class women who went on to learn fancywork (Swan, 1977; Tyner, 2015). In terms of conducting historical research, we must view what has survived over time with a skeptical view. The embroideries made by wealthy women have survived through the decades because their needlework was deemed worthy of saving. Women of privilege have been seen as having worthy stories to preserve.

We cannot reconstruct the missing embroidery that has been lost over time from those who stitched outside the margins of privilege. This is due to historical loss and the marginalization of people of color, enslaved people and the lower class. Furthermore, the indigenous history of Native Americans saturated America. before the English traditions of needlework arrived. The Navajo, Chilkat, Sioux, Iroquois, Chippewa, Seminole, Hopi, Pueblo, Osage and other indigenous peoples created weaving and embroidery and continue to have a rich tradition of fiber arts (Weissman & Lavitt, 1987). This research focuses on the western tradition imported from Britain due to colonization. While indigenous textiles are not explored in this study, it is important to recognize that alternative narratives of history and forms of making were present in America. during the

18th century. Further research should be done examining the influence of Native American traditions on colonial needlework in America.

Finally, while the overwhelming majority of needleworkers were women, there are existing examples of embroidery completed by male sailors (Tyner, 2015; Weissman & Lavitt, 1987). This study focused on the patriarchal definition of male and female that helped perpetuate rigid gender roles in the 18th century U.S. On one hand, categorizing embroidery by gender is helpful in research for constructing an argument about similar groups of work. On the other hand, embroidery should rightfully be seen as a neutral medium. Refreshing conclusions could be drawn from an inclusive study that does not center on the genders of the stitchers.

Research Limitations: Travel, English Influence, and the Historian's Dilemma

There were two factors that limited my research and methodology. I had originally aspired to travel and conduct archival research to see artworks and artifacts in person. Because of the COVID pandemic, I was unable to travel and instead relied upon exiting research on these artifacts and digital reproductions. Seeing the needleworks in person would have facilitated close looking at materiality and aesthetics (instead of looking at digital reproductions) and led to additional insights. Future studies should endeavor to incorporate in-person viewing for the many benefits it offers researchers.

Another challenge in my research was that I found far more studies and documentation of the history of embroidery in England than in the U.S. One factor that may contribute to this is the contrast between recently-established colonies and centuries-

old cities in England that would have more robust record-keeping systems. For example, the surviving documentation of the Marsh family in Worcester County exceeds the records of the Marshes in Pennsylvania. Second, I infer that because more research and scholarship exists about British needlework, it is more valued as a source of historical information in England than in the U.S. There are ancient traditions of needlework going back to the Bayeux Tapestry which depicts scenes from the conquest of England by William, Duke of Normandy in 1066. This has cultivated greater national pride in needlework traditions than those that exist in the U.S. Because of the limited artifacts that address embroidery in the U.S., I relied on some English primary sources and artworks in this thesis. For example, the prints "The School Mistress" and "Keep within Compass" both originated in England. Considering the cultural exchange between the U.S. colonies and England in the 18th century, I argue that these prints can also inform our understanding of education in the U.S. In addition to the influence of England, needlework practices and imagery may have also been influenced by other colonizers. For example, in Pennsylvania, the Swedish and Dutch made settlements there before William Penn. The extent of the English influence on colonial needlework and the influence of other countries as well as indigenous fiber arts are areas that should be further explored.

Finally, as I have alluded to throughout this study, in constructing a historical narrative about the role of needlework in women's education, I faced the eternal challenge of the historian: attempting to reconstruct the past knowing that it cannot truly be done. I have used the surviving artifacts and accounts that were available to me in

order to construct a narrative about 18th century needlework and the Marsh school. I suspect that there are many more artifacts to uncover, stories to tell, and conclusions to draw. In building my research, I have been guided by my own experience as an embroidery artist, educator, and feminist. The historical narrative I have written, rather than being impartial, has been shaped by my experiences, areas of knowledge, and, undoubtedly, shortcomings. But I have dared to ask the question and endeavored to construct its answer in the best way I know how, which is all we can really do.

CONCLUSION

The examination of needlework in this study provides a glimpse into the education of girls and their development into young women. We see the dual purpose of embroidery. It codified feminine behavior through teaching the skills of homemaking and motherhood. Yet, it also allowed women freedom of self-expression and creativity. The creative fancywork completed at a youthful age was a unique opportunity for women to engage in creative artmaking. Later in life, those needlework skills were more often utilized for the upkeep of a home rather than for creative self-reflection (Swan, 1977). Needlework vitally shaped the education of the creative lives of women and girls. This thesis has unraveled the complex ways that embroidery influenced female education using artifacts from the 18th century and the story of Elizabeth and Ann Marsh. In centering female needlework, this study affirms that feminine forms of knowledge and making are valuable and deserving of academic scholarship.

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